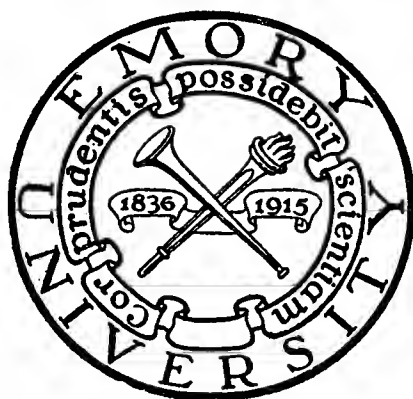






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# THE SCALLYWAG

BY

GRANT ALLEN

AUTHOR OF

'THE TENTS OF SHEM,' 'IVAN GREET'S MASTERPIECE,' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

London

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# THE SCALLYWAG

## CHAPTER XVII.

### REVOLUTIONARY SCHEMES.

NEVERTHELESS, it was not without great damage to his own ultimate chances of future success that Paul had secured this momentary triumph. He was able to write back to Hillborough, it is true, and assure Mr. Solomons he had no further need of assistance for the present ; but he had lost almost a whole term, so far as his own reading for the Greats Schools was concerned, in that valiant spurt at private pupils. His prospects of a First were far more remote now than ever before, for a man can't support himself by teaching

others, and at the same time read hard enough in his spare hours to enter into fair competition with his compeers who have been able to devote their undivided energies to their own education. He had handicapped himself heavily in the race for honours. Paul ruefully realized this profound truth when he began to work on his own account in the Easter vacation and summer term. He had a great deal of leeway still to make up if he was to present himself in a well-prepared condition before the searching scrutiny of those dreaded examiners. And on the issue of the examination depended, in large measure, his chance of obtaining a Fellowship, with the consequent possibility of earning a livelihood, and sooner or later repaying Mr. Solomons.

Spring and the Easter vacation wore away, and summer term came back to Oxford. The new green foliage dawned once more on the chestnuts by the Cherwell. The University blossomed out into punts and flannels; laburnums and pink may glorified the parks; ices were in brisk demand at Cooper's in the High; and the voice of

the sister was heard in the tennis-courts, eagerly criticising the fraternal service. It was all as delightful and as redolent of youth, fizz, and syllabub as Oxford knows how to be, in full leaf and in warm June weather. And Paul Gascoyne, working hard for Greats in his rooms in Peckwater, was nevertheless able to snatch many an afternoon for a pull in a four down the river to Newnham, or for a long stroll round Cumnor and Shotover with his friend Thistleton. Even the shadow of an approaching examination, and the remote prospect of being Mr. Solomon's bond-slave for half a lifetime, cannot quite kill out in the full heart of youth the glory of the green leaf and the fresh vigour of an English spring-tide.

About those days, one morning down at Hillborough, Faith Gascoyne, sitting in the window where the clematis looked into her small bare bedroom, heard a postman's double knock at the door below, and rushed down in haste to take the letters. There was only one, but that was enclosed in a neat square envelope, of better quality than often

came to Plowden's Court, and bearing on the flap a crest and monogram in delicate neutral colour. It was addressed to herself, and bore the Oxford postmark. Faith guessed at once from whom it must come ; but none the less she tore it open with quivering fingers and read it eagerly :

‘ MY DEAR FAITH ’ (it began, for that night at the country inn had made Mrs. Douglas feel quite at home with the National School mistress),—‘ I hope you haven't altogether forgotten your implied promise to come and see me at Oxford this term.’

‘ How can she say so,’ thought Faith, ‘ the wicked thing, when I told her again and again a dozen times over it was absolutely impossible ?’ But that was part of Mrs. Douglas's insinuating cleverness.

‘ Well, my dear little Cornish friend, Nea Blair, who met your brother Paul at Mentone last winter, and was so charmed with him, is coming up to stay with us week after next ; and as I think it would be nicer for both you girls to have a little society of your own age,

so as not to be entirely dependent on an old married woman like me for entertainment, I want you to manage so that your visit may coincide with hers, and then, you know, the same set of festivities will do for both of you. Now, isn't that economical? So mind you don't disappoint us, as dozens of undergraduates who have seen the photo you gave me are dying to make your personal acquaintance, and some of them are rich, and as beautiful as Adonis. Please recollect I'll stand no excuses, and least of all any that have any nonsense in them. Write by return, and tell me, not whether you can come or not—that's settled already—but by what train on Wednesday week we may expect to see you. Mr. Douglas will go down to the station to bring you up. No refusal allowed.

‘Ever yours affectionately,  
‘ELEANOR MARY DOUGLAS.’

Then came a peculiarly fetching P.S. :

‘As I have some reason to believe your brother Paul has a sneaking regard for my little friend Nea, I think it may be just as



well you should come at once and form an opinion about her desirability as a possible sister-in-law, before Mr. Gascoyne has irrevocably committed himself to her without obtaining your previous approbation and consent.'

Faith laid down the letter on the bed before her, and burst at once into a fierce flood of tears.

It was so terrible to stand so near the accomplishment of a dream of years, and yet to feel its realization utterly unattainable !

Ever since Paul first went to Oxford it had been the dearest wish of Faith's heart to pay him a visit there. Every time he came back to that narrow world of Hillborough with tidings of all he had seen and done since he had last been home—of the sights, and the sports, and the wines, and the breakfasts, of the free young life and movement of Oxford, of the colleges and the quads, and the walks and the gardens, and of the meadows thronged on Show-Sunday, of the barges laden with

folk for the boat-races—the longing to join in it all, for once in her life, had grown deeper and deeper in poor Faith's bosom. It was so painful to think how near that bright little world was brought to her and yet how distant still, how impossible, how unattainable ! To Paul, her own brother whom she loved so dearly, and from whom she had learned so much, it was all a mere matter of everyday experience ; but to her, his sister, flesh of his flesh and blood of his blood, it was like the vague murmur of some remote sphere into which she could never, never penetrate. And now the mere receipt of this easy invitation made her feel more than ever the vastness of the gulf that separated her from Oxford. Though Paul was in it and of it, as of right, to her it must for ever be as Paradise to the Peri.

So she burst into tears of pure unhappiness.

She couldn't accept. Of course she couldn't accept. For her to go to Oxford was simply impossible. It was all very well for Mrs. Douglas to say, in her glib

fashion, 'I'll stand no excuses.' That's always the way with these grand folks. They get into the habit of thinking everybody else can manage things as easily and simply as they can. But how on earth could Faith leave the Infants in the middle of term? To say nothing at all about all the other manifold difficulties that stood like lions in the way—how could she get her place filled up by proxy? how could she afford to pay her fare to Oxford and back, after having already allowed herself a trip this year down to Dorsetshire for Christmas? and, above all, how could she provide herself with those needful frocks for day and night which she must needs wear at so grand a place as Mrs. Douglas's, if she didn't wish utterly to disgrace Paul in the eyes of the entire University of Oxford?

All these manifold possibilities rose up at once before poor Faith's eyes as she read that exasperating, tantalizing letter, and filled them with tears from some interminable reservoir.

And yet how tempting the invitation itself was! And, barring that constant

factor of the insensibility of 'grand people' to their neighbours' limitations, how kindly and nicely Mrs. Douglas had written to her !

Faith would have given a great deal (if she'd got it) to be able to accept that cordial offer and see Oxford. But then, she hadn't got it, and that was just the difficulty. There was the rub, as Hamlet puts it. The golden apple was dangled almost within her eager reach, yet not even on tip-toe could she hope to attain to it.

When her father came to see the letter at breakfast-time, however, to Faith's great and unspeakable surprise he turned it over, and, looking across to Mrs. Gascoyne, said thoughtfully :

' Well, missus ?'

There was an interrogation in his tone which drove Faith half frantic.

' Well, Emery ?' his wife answered with the same intonation.

' Couldn't us manage this any'ow, mother ?' the British baronet continued, looking hard at the monogram.

' No, we couldn't, Emery, I'm afraid,' Mrs. Gascoyne made answer.

And that was all Faith heard about it then. Her heart sank once more like lead to the recesses of her bosom.

But as soon as she was gone to endure the Infants once more, as best she might, the baronet paused as he pulled on his boots, in preparation for meeting the 8.40 down, and observed mysteriously to his better-half in a confidential undertone, with a nod towards the door whence Faith had just issued, 'You don't think we could do it, then, mother, don't you?'

Mrs. Gascoyne hesitated. 'It'd cost a power o' money, Emery,' she answered dubiously.

The baronet gazed at the fire with an abstracted air. 'We've made very great sacrifices for our Paul, missus,' he said with emphasis, after a short pause, during which he seemed to be screwing himself up for action; 'we've made very great sacrifices for our Paul, haven't us?'

'Yes, Emery,' his wife answered, with a wistful look, 'I don't deny we've made very great sacrifices.' And then she relapsed for a moment into thoughtful silence.

‘ ‘Tain’t as if we was bound to pay every penny we get to Solomons,’ the husband and father went on again. ‘Now Paul’s of age, ’e’s took over a part of the responsibility, mother.’

‘That’s so, Emery,’ Mrs. Gascoyne assented.

‘The way I look at it is this,’ the baronet went on, glancing up argumentatively, and beating time with his pipe to the expression of his opinion, like one who expects to encounter more opposition. ‘We’ve made very great sacrifices for Paul, we ’ave, an’ wy shouldn’t us expeck to make some sort o’ sacrifices for Faith as well? That’s ’ow I putts it.’

‘There’s reason in that, no doubt,’ Mrs. Gascoyne admitted very timorously.

‘Now, there’s that bill o’ the Colonel’s,’ her husband continued in a most pugnacious tone, taking down his ledger. ‘Seventeen pound fourteen and tuppence—bin owin’ ever since last Christmas twelvemonth. If only the Colonel could be got to pay up like a man—and I’ll arst him myself this very day : Faith won’t go becos he always swears

at 'er—there ain't no reason as I can see wy Faith mightn't be let go up to Oxford.'

'Ow about the Infants?' Mrs. Gascoyne interposed.

'Infants be blowed! Drat them Infants!' her husband answered energetically.

'It's all very well drattin' 'em, as far as that'll go,' Mrs. Gascoyne answered with feminine common-sense: 'but they won't be dratted without a substitoot. She's got to find somebody as'll take 'er place with 'em.'

'I'll find somebody!' the baronet answered with valorous resolve. 'Dang it all, missus! if nobody else can't be got to teach 'em, wy, I'll give up drivin' and take 'em myself, sooner 'n she shouldn't go, you see if I don't.'

'She've set her heart on goin',' Mrs. Gascoyne said once more, with a maternal sigh. 'Poor dear! she's a-longin' for it. I wouldn't say nothin' to 'er face about it, for fear of makin' 'er too bashful like before you; but you seen yourself, Emery, her eyes was that red and tired with cryin'.'

'They was,' the baronet answered. 'I seen 'em myself. An' what I say is this—we've made sacrifices for Paul, very great

sacrifices, and we're pleased and proud of 'im ; so wy shouldn't we make sacrifices for Faith as well, as 'asn't so many chances in life as 'im of ever enjoyin' of 'erself ?

' Wy not, sure ?' Mrs. Gascoyne responded.

' Jest you look at the letter, too,' the baronet went on, admiring the monogram and the address in the corner. ' Anybody could see she was a real tip-topper in a minute by that. "The Red House, Norham Road, Oxford." An' a crest over her name, same as Lady 'Illborough's !

The crest afforded both the liveliest satisfaction.

So, after much confabulation, it was finally resolved that the baronet himself should beard the redoubtable Colonel in his den that very day, and that if the siege operations in that direction turned out a success, Faith should be permitted to go to Oxford. But meanwhile, for fear of failure, it was duly agreed between the two dark conspirators that nothing more should be said to Faith on the subject.

That selfsame evening, while Faith, with



a very white face and a trembling hand, biting her lips hard all the while to keep back the tears, was slowly composing a suitable refusal to Mrs. Douglas, Sir Emery entered, much agitated, into the bare living-room, his hat on his head and his brow steaming, and flung down a cheque on the centre table. 'There, mother,' he cried, half laughing, half crying himself in his joy, 'I said I'd do it, an' I've done it, by George! He've paid up the lot—the whole bloomin' lot—seventeen pound fourteen and tuppence.'

Faith glanced up from her letter aghast. 'Who?' she cried, seizing the cheque in astonishment. 'Oh, father, not the Colonel?'

Her father gave way to a hysterical burst of prolonged laughter. 'Well, I thought 'e'd 'a kicked me downstairs at first,' he said, chuckling, 'but I made un pay me. I says, "Such credit, sir," says I, "is clearly onreasonable. I don't want to 'urry any gentleman, sir," says I, quite respeckful like, my 'at in my hand, "but if you could any'ow make it convenient." An', bless me, missus, if 'e didn't whip out 'is cheque-book on the

spot, an' after sayin' in a 'uff I was a impident, presoomin' feller to venture to dun un, 'e drewed out a cheque for the lot, an' there it is afore you. An' now, Faith, my girl, you can go to Oxford !

Faith jumped up with tears in her eyes. 'Oh, I couldn't, father!' she cried. 'Not that way. I couldn't. It'd seem like robbing mother and you — and Mr. Solomons.'

But youth is weak and time is fleeting. It was her last chance to go to Oxford. After a little persuasion and special pleading on her mother's part, Faith was brought at last to see matters in a different light, and to acquiesce in her father's reiterated view, 'What I says is this—we've made sacrifices for Paul, and why shouldn't us make sacrifices for Faith as well, missus?'

So the end of it all was that before she went to bed that night Faith had indited a second letter to Mrs. Douglas (of which she made beforehand at least a dozen rough draughts of varying excellence), and that in that letter she accepted without reserve Mrs. Douglas's kind invitation to Oxford.

But so profound was her agitation at this delightful prospect that she could hardly hold her pen to write the words ; and after she had finished her first fair copy of the amended letter, she threw her head back and laughed violently.

‘ What’s the matter, dear heart ? ’ her mother asked, leaning over her.

And Faith, still laughing in hysterical little bursts, made answer back, ‘ Why, I’ll have to write it out every bit all over again. I’m in such a state of mind that what do you think I’ve done ? I was just going to end it, to Mrs. Douglas, “ Thanking you for past favours, and hoping for a continuance of the same, I remain, your obedient servant to command, Emery Gascoyne ” ! ’

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### IN GOOD SOCIETY.

THE next week was for Faith a crowded week of infinite preparations. There was the question of a substitute first to be settled, and the price of the substitute's honorarium to be fixed (as the head-mistress magniloquently phrased it), and then there were three dresses to be made forthwith, two for morning and one for evening—a greater number than Faith had ever before dreamed of ordering in her life all at one fell swoop, for her own personal adornment. Little Miss Perkins, the dressmaker at Number Five, two pair back, in the Court, was in and out of the Gascoynes' all day long, especially at lunchtime, measuring and fitting and receiving instructions ; for Faith

wouldn't trust herself to make with her own hands those precious dresses, the neatest and prettiest she had ever possessed. But sympathetic little Miss Perkins made them as cheaply as she could possibly afford, being a friend of the family ; and the stuffs, though new and graceful, were simple and inexpensive ; so that when the bill itself at last came in, even Faith wasn't overshocked at the joint price of the three, and felt easier in her conscience about her hat and flowers. On the Tuesday night when she tried them all on, before an admiring committee of the whole house, they were unanimously voted to be without exception perfect successes ; and a British baronet who chanced to stand by, his hat in his hand, remarked approvingly in a fervour of paternal admiration that he'd driven ' more 'n one young lady to a ball in his time, an' at great houses too, who didn't look one 'arf as much *the* lady as our Faith, God bless 'er ! in that pretty evenin' dress of 'ers. Why, she looked so fine he was 'arf afeard it was takin' a liberty to think o' kissin' 'er.'

Next afternoon, in a flutter of excitement, Faith took the train to London and thence to Oxford, travelling in her old Sunday gown and hat, so as not to spoil her new Oxford dresses.

On the way, one thought alone poisoned Faith's enjoyment, and that was her fixed expectation and belief that Nea Blair would be 'awfully nasty' to her. Nea was one of those 'grand girls,' she knew. Her father was a rector down in Cornwall or somewhere—rich, no doubt, for he'd sent his daughter abroad for the winter with a lady-companion; but, at any rate, a beneficed clergyman of the Church of England, and, therefore, as Faith read the world she lived in, almost to a certainty proud and haughty Nea would have no end of fine new dresses, of course, which would throw poor Faith's three cheap gowns entirely into the shade; and as Mrs. Douglas would, no doubt, have told her that her fellow-guest was a National School mistress, she would foolishly try to suggest between them, as far as possible, that 'dim spectre of the salt' that Faith had read about in 'Lady Geraldine's

Courtship,' and whose meaning Paul had succinctly explained to her.

From London to Oxford Faith travelled second class, permitting herself that hitherto unknown extravagance partly from a vague sense that the occasion demanded it, but partly also lest Nea should happen to be in the same train, and, travelling first herself, should set down Faith as an outer barbarian if she saw her descend from a Parliamentary carriage. At Oxford Station Mrs. Douglas met her—Archie was engaged that afternoon on one of those horrid boards, she said, delegates of lodging-houses, or something equally dull and uninteresting—so she'd come down instead in her proper person to hunt up their luggage. What a pity they two hadn't travelled together!

'Is Miss Blair in the same train, then?' Faith asked as she descended.

'Oh yes,' Mrs. Douglas answered. 'I see her just back there. Come along, Faith. Nea, this is Mr. Gascoyne's sister. Now, my dears, what have you done with your luggage?'

‘Mine’s in the van there,’ Faith said, pointing vaguely forward.

‘And mine’s partly under the seat,’ Nea said, directing a porter at the same time to get out a small portmanteau from—wonder of wonders!—a third-class carriage.

Three hot, disagreeable feelings or ideas rose at once in Faith’s mind. The first was that Nea Blair had travelled third on purpose, because she thought she might meet her. The second was that she herself had wasted the difference in the fares all for nothing. And the third was that she hoped Mrs. Douglas wouldn’t betray to Nea the fact that the National School mistress had come down second. It was just like these nasty grand girls’ condescension to travel third on purpose to put one out of countenance.

Mrs. Douglas, however, didn’t play her false, and the three went off to fetch Nea’s other box, which was so big that Faith fairly trembled to think how many evening dresses might not be in it. They drove up together to the creeper-clad villa, and Faith,



for the very first time in her life, found herself actually in good society.

She went up to her room very nervous indeed, and began to get ready for dinner hastily. She put on her one evening frock with many doubts as to what Nea would wear, and went down at last, a few minutes before the bell rang, into the drawing-room.

Nea was there before her, in a dress still simpler and more unstudied than her own ; and as Faith entered she drew her over instinctively somehow to the sofa with a friendly gesture.

‘Oh, what a sweet gown!’ she cried in unaffected admiration, as Faith seated herself by her side ; and, indeed, Faith did look very beautiful, with her lustrous black hair knotted neatly in a roll at the back of her head, and her dark eyes and olive complexion thrown up by the delicate colour of her dainty foulard.

‘You’ll be tired enough of it before you go, I expect,’ Faith answered defiantly, ‘for it’s the only evening frock I’ve got, and I shall have to wear it every night while I stop here.’ Her very pride compelled her

to fling her poverty unprovoked thus point-blank at the unoffending faces of others.

‘Oh, of course! One doesn’t bring a whole stock of dresses with one for a short visit like this,’ Nea answered, smiling; ‘and this one’s so pretty one could never get tired of it. I think that’s the best of simple gowns—they always look well if you wear them for ever; and nobody ever notices they’ve seen them before, because they’re so unobtrusive. Whereas, if one has a showy, striking dress, and wears it often, it attracts attention, and then everybody says, “Oh! that’s the same old thing she wore last season, don’t you know, at the So-and-So’s!”’

‘That’s just what I thought,’ Faith answered, trying to look unconcerned, ‘when I ordered this one.’

‘And I always say,’ Nea went on, glancing down at her own little quiet cashmere, ‘if one’s poor, one should buy the simplest possible things, which never look out of place, and never go out of fashion.’

She said it in the sense Good Society always says such things in—the purely

relative sense which regards the country parson's endowment as polite poverty ; and she was thinking really of her own wardrobe, not of Faith Gascoyne's. But Faith, like all the rest of us, chose to accept the remark from her own standpoint, according to which Nea Blair was a 'nasty grand girl,' a representative of wealth, rank, class, and fashion. 'If one's poor,' she answered, flaring up internally, 'one must buy what one can afford ; but that's no reason why one should be dictated to in that, or in anything else, by others.' For in the phrase 'one should buy the simplest possible things,' Faith thought she detected the hateful didactic leaven of the District Visitor.

By a rare flash of intuition—due, perhaps, to her profoundly sympathetic and affectionate nature—Nea divined with an instinctive insight the nature of the error into which Faith had fallen, and hastened to remove it as delicately as possible. 'Oh, I don't mean that I do it to please other people,' she answered, with her winning smile ; 'I do it to please myself. Papa

never dreams for a minute of dictating to me about dress. I get my allowance four times a year, and I spend it as seems best to me.'

Faith coloured up with regret for her foolish mistake, which she couldn't fail now to recognise. 'But *you're* not poor,' she said with a marked emphasis.

'We're certainly not rich,' Nea replied, looking down so as not to meet those half-angry eyes. 'Of course, these things are all comparative. But I have to be very careful of my expenses.'

'Well, but you went abroad for the whole winter with a companion,' Faith objected sternly.

'Oh, that was a very special thing, because I'd been ill. Papa did that, not because he was rich, but because he was so anxious to make me well again.'

'I see,' Faith answered, and wished to herself people wouldn't use words in such unnatural senses. Talk about being poor, indeed, when you're a beneficed clergyman of the Church of England, and can send your daughter to a good hotel on the

Riviera, with a hired companion to be her guardian and chaperon!

Presently the Douglasses themselves came down, and the four went in to dinner together. 'We haven't asked anybody to meet you, this first evening, Nea,' Mrs. Douglas said, 'because we thought you'd be tired after your long journey; but your brother's coming in for a chat after dinner, Faith; as he and Nea are old friends, you know, we thought he wouldn't matter. And he's going to bring young Thistleton of Christ Church with him.'

Faith almost shook in her chair at the terrible prospect. However would she get on, she wondered, with all these fine people thrust at once upon her? Good Society began positively to appal her.

Dinner, however, passed off very well. With Mrs. Douglas herself Faith felt quite at home now; and the Professor, though prodigiously learned, was a very pleasant man, Faith thought, with lots of fun in him. Nea didn't always understand what he said, apparently; and it struck Faith with some little surprise that Nea seemed

on the whole to know less about the subjects Mr. Douglas discussed than she herself did. And yet Nea had had the very best education ! Strange, then, that she thought the *Prometheus* was written by Sophocles, when Faith, who had read it through in Paul's Bohn, couldn't imagine how anyone could mistake the *Æschylean* touch in it. And then she had never even heard of Shelley's '*Prometheus Unbound*' ! Faith began to consider her quite a little *ignoramus* !

The fact was, Faith's whole days had been spent at home (or with the Infants) and among Paul's books, and her one native longing and desire in life was for more culture. Hence, like many self-educated people, she had a wide though not a deep knowledge of books and things, exactly suited to make a brilliant show in general society ; while Nea, whose tastes were by no means learned, had only acquired the ordinary English schoolgirl's stock of knowledge, and was far behind Faith in everything that pertains to general education.

The Professor, for his part, being an easy-going man, soon found out that Faith and

he had most in common, and addressed his conversation mainly to her throughout the dinner. This flattered Faith and gave her confidence. She began to suspect that, after all, she might be able to hold her own fairly in Oxford, if one of the very heads of that learned society thought her not wholly unworthy of wasting his time upon. Appreciation brought out her best points, as opposition did her worst ; and before the end of the dinner she was positively brilliant.

Once, too, in the course of it, she discovered to her surprise another little point of superiority to Nea. The Cornish girl had been talking of her experiences at Mentone, and had been particularly kind in her remarks about Paul, which made Faith's face flush once more, but this time with pleasure. There was nothing she loved like having Paul appreciated.

'You weren't at the same hotel, though,' she said after awhile. 'I suppose yours was a much bigger and a more expensive one ?'

'Oh dear no !' Nea answered simply ;

‘your brother and Mr. Thistleton were at the swell place; but Madame Ceriolo took me to quite a foreign house, that she liked much better, partly because it was cheap, and partly because her tastes are awfully cosmopolitan. I never was in such polyglot society in my life before. We had Poles, Hungarians, Greeks, Germans, Swedes, and Russians at *table d’hôte* beside us.’

‘Dear me,’ Faith exclaimed, ‘how awkward that must have been! You must have felt every time you opened your mouth that the eyes of Europe were upon you.’

‘I did,’ Nea answered, with an amused smile. ‘But as they didn’t understand me, it didn’t much matter.’

‘The conversation was all in French, of course,’ Faith went on innocently.

‘With the foreigners, oh yes! But I don’t speak French myself at all fluently—not anything like as well as Mr. Gascoyne, for example. He speaks just beautifully.’

‘Oh, I don’t consider Paul’s a very good accent,’ Faith answered with easy confi-



dence. ‘We learnt together when we were quite little things, he and I, and I know he could never pronounce his *rs* with the right amount of rolling, or distinguish between words like “tremper” and “tromper.” This is how Paul speaks,’ and she repeated a few lines of one of Victor Hugo’s odes that they had read together, in perfect mimicry of the few English faults in her brother’s pronunciation. They were merely the minor tricks of intonation which must almost inevitably persist in any foreigner’s mouth, however profound his acquaintance with the language ; but Faith’s quick feminine ear detected them at once, compared with Mademoiselle Clarice’s Parisian flow, and her ready tongue imitated them absolutely to perfection.

Nea listened, lost in amazement. ‘I shouldn’t know that wasn’t the purest Paris accent,’ she answered, half jealous on Paul’s account. ‘I thought myself Mr. Gascoyne spoke admirably.’

‘Oh no ; this is how it ought to be,’ Faith answered, now quite at home. And she delivered the lines in excellent French

as Mademoiselle Clarice herself might have said them, only with infinitely more appreciation of their literary vigour.

Nea was astonished. 'You speak splendidly,' she said. 'I'd give anything myself to be able to speak that way.'

'Oh, I've spoken ever since I was two years old,' Faith answered offhand—for, to her, it seemed the most commonplace accomplishment on earth to be able to talk like the French lady's-maid. But to Nea it was proof of a consummate education.

After dinner they rose and went into the drawing-room, Faith feeling rather awkward once more, now, as to how to proceed, and keeping her eyes firmly fixed on everything Nea did for guidance.

Presently Paul and his friend came in. Faith walked towards the door with what self-possession she could, most conscious of her gait as she crossed the room and kissed her brother. Then she turned and was introduced to the blonde young man. Why, what a curious thing Paul should never have told her! The blonde young man was extremely handsome.

Paul had always described Thistleton as a very good fellow and all that sort of thing, but had never enlarged in the least upon his personal appearance; and Faith had somehow imbibed the idea that the blonde young man was stumpy and unpleasant. Perhaps it was because she had heard he was rich, and had therefore vaguely mixed him up in her own mind with the Gorgius Midas junior of Mr. Du Maurier's sketches in *Punch*. But certainly, when she saw a fine, well-built young fellow of six feet one, with intelligent eyes, and a pleasing, ingenuous, frank countenance, she failed to recognise in him altogether the Thistleton of whom her brother had told her. The blonde young man took her fancy at once, so much so that she felt shy at the idea of talking to him.

For to Faith it was a very great ordeal indeed, this sudden introduction to a society into which, till this moment, she had never penetrated. The very size and roominess of the apartments—though the Douglasses' house was by no means a large one—the brilliancy of the gas, the lightness of the

costume, the flowers and decorations, the fluffiness, and airiness, and bright colour of everything, fairly took her breath away. She felt herself moving in a new world of gauze and glitter. And then to be seated in these novel surroundings, to undertake conversation of an unrehearsed kind with unknown strangers, it was almost more than Faith's equanimity was proof against. But she bore up bravely, nevertheless, for very shame, and answered at first, almost as in a dream, all that the blonde young man said to her.

Thistleton, however, had no such difficulties, for he was born rich ; and he talked away so easily and pleasantly to the National School mistress about things she really took an interest in and understood, that at the end of an hour she was hardly afraid of him, especially as he seemed so fond of Paul, and so proud and pleased about his Marlborough Essay.

‘I wanted to bet him ten to one in fivers he'd get it,’ Thistleton remarked, all radiant; ‘but he wouldn't bet. He knew he was sure of it, and he wasn't going to hedge.

And all the House was awfully glad of it. Why, the Dean himself called him up and congratulated him !

As for Paul, he talked most of the time to Nea, with occasional judicious interventions on Mrs. Douglas's part, who was never so pleased as when she could make young people happy.

When they took their departure that evening Faith said to her hostess, ' What a very nice young man that Mr. Thistleton is ! ' As a matter of fact, it was the very first opportunity she had ever had of talking to any young man of decent education and gentlemanly manners on equal terms, except her own brother, and she was naturally pleased with him.

Mrs. Douglas shrugged her shoulders a little bit—almost as naturally as Madame Ceriolo.

' Do you think so ? ' she said. ' Well, he's nice enough, I suppose ; but his manners haven't that repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere, somehow. He's a trifle too boisterous for my taste, you know. Good-hearted, of course, and all

that sort of thing, but not with the stamp of Blue Blood about him.'

'Oh, nonsense, my dear Eleanor,' the Professor ejaculated with a good round mouth. 'The young fellow's as well behaved as most earls in England, and, if it comes to that, a great deal better.'

'I'm so glad *you* say so, Mr. Douglas,' Faith put in with a smile—'that it's nonsense, I mean—for *I* should have been afraid to.'

'Well, but really, Faith,' Mrs. Douglas retorted, 'he isn't fit to hold a candle any day to your brother Paul.'

'I should think not, indeed!' Nea exclaimed immediately, with profound conviction. 'Why, Mr. Gascoyne's just worth a thousand of him!'

Faith turned with a grateful look to Nea for that kindly sentence; and yet she would have liked the praise of Paul all the better if it hadn't been contrasted with dispraise of Mr. Thistleton. For her part, she thought him a most delightful young man, and was only sorry he was so dreadfully rich, and therefore, of course,

if one got to know him better, no doubt nasty.

They parted in the passage outside Faith's bedroom, and Nea, as she said 'Good-night, dear,' to her new friend, leant forward to kiss her. Faith hesitated for a moment: she wasn't accustomed to cheapen her embraces in the usual feline feminine manner, and as yet she didn't feel sure of Nea; but next instant she yielded, and pressed her companion's hand. 'Thank you so much,' she said with tears in her eyes, and darted into her room. But Nea didn't even so much as know for what she thanked her.

Faith meant for not having been 'grand' and crushed her. To herself she was always the National School mistress.

But Nea saw in her only a graceful, handsome, well-read girl, and Paul Gascoyne's sister.

So ended Faith Gascoyne's first equally dreaded and longed-for evening in Good Society.

Outside the Douglasses' door Thistleton paused and looked at his friend.

‘Why, Gascoyne,’ he said, ‘you never told me what a beautiful girl your sister was, and so awfully clever!’

Paul smiled. ‘As a rule,’ he said, ‘men don’t blow the trumpet for their own female relations.’

Thistleton accepted the explanation in silence, and walked along mute for two or three minutes. Then he began again, almost as if to himself: ‘But this one,’ he said, ‘is so exceptionally beautiful.’

Paul was aware of an uncomfortable sensation at the base of his throat, and diverted the conversation to the chances of a bump on the first night of the races.



## CHAPTER XIX.

### IDYLS OF YOUTH.

To Faith those ten delicious days at Oxford were a dream fulfilled—pure gold, every one of them. How glorious were those strolls round Magdalen cloisters ; those fresh morning walks in Christ Church meadows ; those afternoon lounges in the cool nooks of Wadham Gardens ! How grand the tower of Merton loomed up in the moonlight ; how noble was the prospect of the crowded High, with the steeple of St. Mary's and Laud's porch in the middle distance, viewed from the stone steps of Queen's or University ! How she loved each mouldering pinnacle of Oriel, each vaulted boss in the great roof of Christ Church ! What delightful afternoon teas in Tom Quad ;

what luxurious breakfasts in the New Buildings at Balliol ! To the National School mistress, fresh from the din of the infants and the narrow precincts of Plowden's Court, the height and breadth and calm and glory of those majestic colleges were something unknown, unpictured, unfancied. Even after all Paul had told her, it eclipsed and effaced her best ideal. She had only one pang—that she must so soon leave it all.

And what a grand phantasmagoria it produced in her mind, that whirling week of unparalleled excitement ! In the morning, to view the Bodleian or the Radcliffe, to walk under the chestnuts on the Cherwell bank, or to admire from the bridge the soaring tower of Magdalen. At mid-day, to lunch in some undergraduate's quarters, or with bearded dons in some panelled common-room : for Mrs. Douglas was known to be the best of hostesses, and whoever saw Oxford under her auspices was sure not to lack for entertainment or for entertainments. In the afternoon, to float down the river to Iffley in a tub pair ; or

to lounge on padded punts under the broad shade of Addison's Walk ; or to drink tea in rooms looking out over the Renaissance court of St. John's ; or to hear the anthem trilled from sweet boyish throats in New College Chapel. In the evening, to dine, at home or abroad, in varied company ; to listen to some concert in the hall of Exeter ; or to see the solemn inner quad of Jesus incongruously decked out with Japanese lanterns and hanging lights for a Cymric festival. A new world seemed to open out all at once before her. A world all excitement, pleasure, and loveliness.

To most girls brought up in quiet cultivated homes, a visit to Oxford is one long whirl of dissipation. To Faith, brought up in the cabman's cottage, it was a perfect revelation of art, life, and beauty. It sank into her soul like first love. If you can imagine a bird's-eye view of Florence, Paris, and educated society rolled into one, that is something like what those ten days at Oxford were to Faith Gascoyne.

Every night Nea Blair went out with her, and every night, to Faith's immense

surprise, Nea wore the same simple cashmere dress she had worn at Mrs. Douglas's that first evening. It made Faith feel a great deal more at home with her; after three days, indeed, she quite got over her fear of Nea. Nea was so gentle, so sweet, so kind, it was impossible for anybody long to resist her. By the third evening they were sworn friends, and when Faith went up with her after the little carpet-dance to bed, it was actually with her arm round the 'grand girl's' waist that she mounted the staircase.

On the morning of their fourth day at Oxford they were walking in the High with Mrs. Douglas—on their way to visit the reredos at All Souls'—when just outside the doors of the Mitre Nea was suddenly stopped by a golden-haired apparition.

'Oh my, momma!' the apparition exclaimed in a fine Pennsylvanian twang, 'if here ain't Nea Blair as large as life and twice as nat'ral! Well, now, I do call that jest lovely! To think we should meet you here again, Nea! But I felt like it, somehow; I said to momma this morning as we

were unloading the baggage down at the cars, "I shouldn't be a bit surprised if Nea Blair's at Oxford." I knew you were coming up this summer term, you know, to visit friends, and I kind of guessed we should probably synchronize.'

'Nea, my dear,' Mrs. Douglas remarked with chilly dignity, 'will you introduce your acquaintances.'

For Mrs. Douglas's British back was considerably stiffened by the newcomer's obvious lack of the Vere de Vere emotional temperament.

'This is Miss Boyton,' Nea said, presenting her; 'she was with us at Mentone. And this is Mrs. Boyton.'

For where Isabel was, there her mother sank naturally into the background.

'Yes; and, my dear, we've only just arrived! We wired to Mr. Thistleton to engage rooms for us at the Mitre. There's another hotel at Oxford, he told us—the Randolph—but it doesn't sound so mediæval and English and aristocratic as the Mitre. And now we've come out to look around a bit and see the city.'

‘Oh, you’re Mr. Thistleton’s guests, are you?’ Faith asked with a faint under-current of suspicion, for she didn’t half like this sudden intrusion of the golden-haired Pennsylvanian upon her special undergraduate. Though she had only been three days at Oxford, Thistleton had already been most marked in his politeness, and Faith, though innocent as a child of ulterior designs upon the rich young man, didn’t want to have his immediate kind attentions diverted upon others.

‘Yes, indeed,’ Isabel answered. ‘We’ve gotten our own rooms for ourselves at the Mitre, of course, but we expect Mr. Thistleton to walk us around and give us a good time while we stop in Oxford. Momma and I are looking forward to enjoying ourselves all the time. Oh, don’t the place look jest lovely!’

‘It is lovely,’ Nea said; ‘I always enjoy it so much. But why did you telegraph to Mr. Thistleton, instead of Mr. Gascoyne? We saw so much more of Mr. Gascoyne at Mentone.’

‘Well, to tell you the truth,’ Isabel

answered, 'I didn't jest feel like asking Mr. Gascoyne; while that young Thistleton fellow—he's a real good sort, but only a boy, you know, so I didn't mind asking him.'

'This is Mr. Gascoyne's sister,' Nea said, with a slight wave towards Faith, who stood irresolute in the background. 'She's stopping with me at Mrs. Douglas's. We're going just now to see one of the colleges—All Souls.'

'Well, I don't mind if we catch on to it,' Isabel answered briskly. 'We've jest come out to see what the place is like, and one college 'll do for us, I presoom, as well as another. According to the guide, the city must be full of them.'

Mrs. Douglas knocked under with condescending tact. She recollected that Nea had told her Miss Boyton was rich; and, after all, there are always lots of nice young men lying about loose who'd be glad to pick up with a rich and pretty American.

'If your mamma and you would like to join our party,' she said with her best second-class smile (Mrs. Douglas's smiles

were duly graduated for all ranks of society), 'I'm sure we shall be delighted. Any friends of Nea's are always welcome to us.'

So from that moment forth the Boytons were duly accepted as part and parcel of Mrs. Douglas's set during that crowded race-week. They went everywhere with Faith and Nea, and shared in most of the undergraduate feasts which Mrs. Douglas offered vicariously for her young friends' amusement. Undergraduate Oxford loves anything fresh, and Isabel Boyton's freshness, at any rate, was wholly beyond dispute. Before the week was out, the golden-haired Pennsylvanian had become a feature in Christ Church, and even betting was offered in Peckwater whether or not Gascoyne would marry her.

The same evening Mrs. Douglas gave her first dinner-party for her two guests, and as they sat in the drawing-room, just before the earliest outsider arrived, Mrs. Douglas turned to Faith (Nea hadn't yet come down) and remarked parenthetically :

'Oh, by the way, Mr. Thistleton will



take you in to dinner, my dear. He'll go after your brother Paul, and then Mr. Wade 'll take in Nea.'

Faith shrank back a little alarmed.

'Oh, but tell me, Mrs. Douglas,' she cried, somewhat shamefaced, 'why mayn't I go last? I don't want to go in before Nea.'

Mrs. Douglas shook her head in most decided disapproval. 'It can't be helped, my child,' she said. 'It's not my arrangement. I've got nothing on earth to do with settling the table of precedence. It's the Lord Chamberlain who has long ago decided once for all that your brother Paul, as a baronet's son, walks in before young Thistleton, and that you, as a baronet's daughter, walk in before Nea.'

Faith gave a little gesture of extreme dissatisfaction. This playing at baronetcy was to her most distasteful.

'I can't bear it,' she cried. 'Do, dear Mrs. Douglas, as a special favour, let Nea at least go in before me.'

But Mrs. Douglas was inflexible. 'No, no,' she said; 'none of your nasty Radical

levelling ways for me, turning society topsy-turvy with your new-fangled ideas, and all just to suit your own unbridled fancy. People of quality must behave as sich. If you happen to be born a baronet's daughter you must take precedence of a country parson's girl. *Noblesse oblige*. That's the price you have to pay for being born in an exalted station in life. You must fulfil the duties that belong to your place in society.'

So, with a very bad grace, poor Faith yielded.

When Nea came down, Faith observed with surprise that she was wearing even now the same simple cashmere dress as on the first night of her visit. Faith had expected that for this special function at least Nea would have appeared arrayed, like Solomon, in all her glory. But no; the plain cashmere was still to the front, as invariable as Faith's own delicate foulard. A curious thought flashed across Faith's mind: Could the 'grand girl' herself, as she still sometimes thought her, have brought but one evening dress in her box, just as she herself had done?

For, after all, Faith began to observe that, in a deeper sense than she had at first expected, we are all in the last resort built of much the same mould, and that the differences of high and low are a great deal more mere differences of accent, speech, and dress than of intellect or emotion.

That evening Mr. Thistleton, she thought, was more attentive to her than ever; and when she spoke to him once about the golden-haired apparition that had flashed upon them in the High Street from the Mitre that morning, he only laughed good-humouredly, and remarked, with tolerant contempt, that Miss Boyton was 'real racy' of American soil, and that her momma was a most amiable and unobtrusive old Egyptian mummy.

'You saw a good deal of her at Mentone, I suppose,' Faith said, looking up at him from her niche in the ottoman.

'Yes, and heard a good deal of her, too,' Thistleton answered, smiling. 'She wasn't born to blush unseen, that excellent Miss Boyton. Wherever she goes she makes

herself felt. She's amusing, that's all : one endures her because one gets such lots of fun out of her.'

'But she's very rich, Paul says,' Faith murmured abstractedly.

'Oh, they grow 'em very rich in America, I fancy,' the blonde young man replied with careless ease. 'So do we in Yorkshire, too: we don't set much store by *that* up in the North, you know. People are all rolling in money with us in Sheffield. To be rich up there is positively vulgar, as far as that goes. The distinguished thing in the North is to be poor but cultured. It's almost as fashionable as being poor but honest used once to be in Sunday-school literature.'

'Still, she's pretty, don't you think, in her own way?' Faith asked, pleading Miss Boyton's case out of pure perversity.

'She's pretty enough, if you go in for prettiness,' the blonde young man retorted, with a glance of admiration at Faith's own raven hair and great speaking eyes. 'I don't myself—I don't like women to be pretty.'

‘Don’t like them to be pretty!’ Faith repeated, aghast.

‘No,’ the blonde young man replied stoutly. ‘I prefer beauty to prettiness. I never cared much for tow-haired dolls. Eyes with a soul in them are much more to my taste. Besides,’ he added, breaking off suddenly, ‘she’s not quite *our* sort, you know, Miss Gascoyne.’

‘*Our* sort?’ Faith echoed interrogatively, taken aback at the inclusiveness of that first person plural. ‘I—I don’t quite understand you.’

‘Well, *your* sort, then,’ the blonde young man corrected, with imperturbable good-humour, ‘if you won’t let me reckon myself in the same day with you. I mean, she’s not a person of any birth or position or refinement; she’s a *parvenue*, you know, a perfect *parvenue*. I don’t mean to say I go in for a Plantagenet ancestry myself,’ he continued quickly, seeing Faith was trying hard to put in a word and interrupt him; ‘but I don’t like people quite so freshly fledged as she is. I prefer them with some tincture of polite society.’

Faith blushed up to the eyes with some strange sense of shame. It was so novel a position for her to find herself in, that she hardly knew how to brazen it out. 'She was very well received at Mentone,' she stammered out uneasily.

'At Mentone? Oh yes; in a cosmopolitan place like that one can swallow anybody—why, we even swallowed Miss Blair's chaperon, that delightful little humbug and adventuress, Madame Ceriolo, who anywhere else in the world would have been utterly impossible. But, hang it all! you know, Miss Gascoyne, you wouldn't like your own brother, now, for instance, to marry her?'

Faith looked down, and hardly knew what to say. 'If ever Paul marries,' she answered at last, speaking out her whole heart, 'I should like him to marry—some one more worthy of him.'

As she spoke she lifted her eyes again, and met Nea Blair's, who, seated close by, had just caught by accident the last few words of their conversation. Nea let her glance fall upon the carpet, and coloured

faintly. Then Faith felt sure, with an instinctive certainty, that Nea was not wholly indifferent to her penniless brother.

When they went upstairs that night again, they sat long talking in Nea's room, till their candles had burnt low in the sockets. They talked unrestrainedly, like two bosom friends. Faith wasn't afraid any longer of the 'grand girl.' She was more at home with Nea than she had ever been with anybody else, except Paul, before. As she rose at last, reluctantly, to go to bed, she held Nea's hand a long time in hers. 'Nea,' she said, pressing it hard, 'how strange it all seems! I was so afraid to meet you only four days since—though it's like a year now, for every day's been so crammed with pleasure—and to-night I can't bear to think I've got to go back so soon to my school once more, and my dull routine, and my petty life, and never again see anything more of you. It's been all like a beautiful, beautiful dream—meeting you here, and all the rest—and I shall feel so sad to have to go away by-and-by and leave it all.'

‘Perhaps we shall meet often again in future, now we’ve once got to know and love each other,’ Nea answered, soothing her.

Faith turned with the candle in her hand to go. Great tears were in her eyes. She trembled violently.

‘No, no,’ she said ; ‘I sometimes think it’s all a mistake ever for a moment to come out of one’s native sphere. It makes the revulsion seem all the worse when you have to go back to it.’



## CHAPTER XX.

### BREAKING THE ICE.

THE row up the river to Ensham was delightful: the sky was blue, the meadows were green, the water was clear, and the lilies that lolled like Oriental beauties on its top were snow-white and golden. Only one thing damped Faith's and Nea's happiness—it was the last day of their visit to Oxford.

They had much to regret. The gardens were so beautiful, the colleges so calm, the river so peaceful—and the two young men had been so very attentive.

Faith wondered how, after Mr. Thistleton's open and unaffected homage, she could ever endure the boorish politeness of the few young fellows she saw from time to

time after rare intervals at Hillborough. Nea wondered how, after seeing so much of that nice Mr. Gascoyne at Mentone and Oxford, she could ever relapse into the humdrum life of keeping house for her father in the Cornish rectory. Mr. Gascoyne was so clever, and so full of beautiful ideas! He seemed to be so thoroughly human all through. Nea loved to hear him talk about men and things. And she really did think, in a sort of way, that Mr. Gascoyne, perhaps, to some extent, liked her.

So when she found herself, after lunch at Mrs. Douglas's picnic, strolling away with Paul towards the field where the fritillaries grow, and the large purple orchises, she was conscious generally of a faint thrill of pleasure—that strange, indefinite, indefinable thrill which goes so much deeper than the shallow possibilities of our haphazard language.

They wandered and talked for many minutes, picking the great chequered blossoms as they moved, and never thinking whither they went, either with their feet or their tongues, as is the wont of adolescence.

Nea was full of praise for Faith—such an earnest girl, so sincere and profound when you came to know her; and Paul, who, to a great extent, had been Faith's teacher, was proud that his pupil should be liked and appreciated.

‘But what a pity,’ Nea said at last, ‘we should have to part to-morrow! For we’ve both of us got on so well together.’

‘It is a pity,’ Paul said, ‘a very great pity. Faith has never enjoyed anything so much in her life, I know; and your being there has made it doubly enjoyable for her.’

‘Oh, I’m so glad to hear you say so,’ Nea exclaimed, with evident delight. ‘You can’t think how much I’ve enjoyed having her there too. She’s a dear girl. We’ve had such long, long talks together in our own rooms every evening. And, do you know, Mr. Gascoyne,’ she added shyly, ‘before she came I was so afraid of meeting her.’

‘Why?’ Paul asked, unable to understand such a feeling towards Faith on the part of a born lady like Nea.

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ Nea answered. ‘I

can't exactly say why. But sometimes, when you want to like somebody ever so much, don't you know, you're so afraid in return they won't like you.'

'And you wanted to like Faith?' Paul asked, all tremulous.

'I wanted to like her, oh, ever so much! But I was afraid she mightn't take a fancy to *me*. It often happens so, of course; but I didn't want it to be so with her. And now I'm sure she likes me very much, and that's such a comfort to me.'

'You're very kind,' Paul answered, embarrassed.

There was a long pause, and their eyes met. Eyes can say so much more than tongues. Nea's fell again as she added slowly, 'And I hope now we shall meet very, very often.'

'Who? You and Faith?' Paul cried, biting his lip hard, and holding in his words with difficulty.

'Yes,' Nea said. 'Some day she must come down to Cornwall and see us.'

Paul looked up from the fritillaries, and felt his heart beat and heave.

‘That can never, never be,’ he answered solemnly.

Nea turned to him all at once with an astonished look.

‘Never, Mr. Gascoyne?’ she cried. ‘Oh, don’t say that! I want to meet her very often now. We’re friends for life. Why shouldn’t I see her?’

It was one of those moments in a man’s life when, do what he will, the passion within him gets the better of him and out-masters him. He looked into Nea’s deep eyes—those eyes he would never see after to-morrow again—and answered in a tone of poignant regret, ‘Because you and I must keep as far apart as we can from one another.’

Nea more than half guessed his meaning at once, but she would have it direct from his own very lips before she could believe it.

‘And why, Mr. Gascoyne?’ she asked with a throbbing heart.

‘Because,’ Paul said boldly, blurting out the whole truth in spite of himself, ‘Nea, I love you.’

There was a faint short interval, during which Nea felt a sort of electric quiver pass

all through her frame ; and then she murmured very low, 'Thank you, Mr. Gascoyne, thank you.'

'And I'm afraid,' Paul went on—with insensate folly, as he thought to himself—'I'm afraid—I'm sure : you love me a little in return, Nea.'

Nea raised her eyes, one blush from chin to forehead, and met his gaze bashfully.

'More than that : a great deal,' she answered, with a tremor.

Paul sat down on the dry bank by the hedge, and seated Nea gently on a big stone beside him.

'And though I shall never see you again after to-morrow,' he said, 'I was wicked enough and foolish enough—it came over me so just now, that I couldn't avoid giving myself the satisfaction of telling you so.'

'I'm glad you did,' Nea murmured through the tears that struggled hard to rise and choke her utterance. 'I like to know it.'

'It was wrong of me, very wrong of me,' Paul cried, already penitent ; 'but, Nea, I

can't be sorry I did, when I think how sweet, how delicious, it is for me to know that through all my future life I can carry away the memory of those words you just uttered. "More than that: a great deal"—I shall never forget them.'

'Thank you,' Nea cried once more, with sweet simplicity.

Paul looked at her long, with a great yearning in his heart.

'And it's hard to think,' he went on, 'we must part for ever to-morrow.'

'Why for ever?' Nea asked, looking back at him again with womanly trust. 'Why for ever, Mr. Gascoyne? If you love me, and I love you, why need it be for ever?'

Paul tore a purple fritillary to pieces nervously.

'Oh, what have I done?' he said, looking up at her anxiously. 'Why did I ever begin it? I've acted so wrong, so wickedly, so cruelly! I ought never to have spoken to you on the subject at all. I ought to have locked it up tight—tight in my own bosom.'

'I should have found it out, even if you

hadn't told me,' Nea answered simply. 'And whether you told me or not, I, at least, would have loved you.'

Paul took her little hand unreprieved in his own.

'I was mad, though,' he said; 'I was wicked to trouble you. Nea, I won't say anything about the difference in our positions, or anything like that, for I know you are good enough and true enough to love a man for himself, and not for his wealth or what else he can give you. I know, poor as I am, and sprung from where I spring, you'd be willing to take me. But I oughtn't to have spoken to you at all about my love. I ought to have stifled and hidden it all from you, knowing, as I do now, that we can never marry. It was cruel of me so to cross your path, so to wring that confession from your own sweet lips—only to tell you that I can never marry you.'

'You didn't wring it from me,' Nea whispered low. 'I like to tell you so.'

'Oh, Nea!' Paul cried, and pressed her hand in silence.



‘Yes, I like to tell you,’ she repeated. ‘I love to tell you. I’m glad for my own sake you’ve made it possible for me to tell you. I liked you very, very much at Mentone; and every day I’ve seen you since I’ve liked you better, and better, and better. And then, I’ve talked so much about you with Faith. Every evening she and I have done nothing but talk about you. That was why I wanted to like Faith so much, because—because I was so very fond of you. But, Paul,’ she said it out quite naturally, ‘Paul, why can’t you marry me?’

Paul began in some vague, shadowy, indefinite way to tell her once more about those terrible Claims that so weighed upon his conscience, but before he’d got well through the very first sentence Nea said, interrupting him :

‘I know, I know. I suppose you mean about Mr. Solomons.’

‘Has Faith told you all about Mr. Solomons, then?’ Paul exclaimed in surprise.

‘Yes,’ Nea answered. ‘Of course I

wanted to know as much as I could about you, because I was so much interested in you, and—and—I loved you so dearly ; and Faith told me all about that, and it made me so very, very sorry for you.’

‘Then, if you know all that,’ Paul cried, ‘you must know also how wrong it was of me to speak to you, how impossible for me ever to marry you.’

Nea looked down at the fritillaries in her hand, and began to arrange them nervously with twitching fingers. After a while she spoke.

‘I don’t think so,’ she said in a very calm voice. ‘Even if we two can never, never marry, it’s better I should know you love me, and you should know I love you. It’s better to have found that out, even though nothing more come of it, than to go through life blindly, not knowing whether we had ever won one another. I shall go back to Cornwall, oh, ever so much happier than I came away, feeling certain at least now that you love me, Paul.’

The young man leant forward. His lips pursed up of themselves. Nea didn’t shrink

away from him. She didn't tremble or withdraw. She allowed him to kiss her. The kiss thrilled through her inmost being.

Paul leant back once more, all penitence, against the bank.

‘What have I done?’ he cried, aghast at his own folly. ‘Let us rise and go, Nea. The longer we stay here, the worse and worse will we make matters.’

‘No,’ Nea answered quietly. ‘I don’t want to go. I like sitting here. I can’t let you go yet. We must understand better how we stand with each other. You mustn’t go, Paul, till you’ve told me everything.’

Paul, delighted in his secret heart at the moment’s respite, began once more, and told her all his fears and doubts for the future—how he was bound hand and foot to Mr. Solomons; how he must spend his whole life in trying to repay him; and what folly it would be for him to dream of marrying. He reproached himself bitterly for having let Nea see into the secret of his heart. He ought never to have told her, he said; he ought never to have told her.

Nea listened to him to the very end. Then she fixed her earnest eyes upon him and answered softly : ‘ Paul, I will wait for you, if I wait a lifetime.’

‘ It isn’t a case for waiting,’ Paul cried ; ‘ it’s a case for despair !’

‘ Then I won’t despair,’ Nea answered. ‘ Not even to please you. I’ll be happy enough in knowing you love me.’

For a minute or two more they talked it over together in gentle whispers. Nea could never love anyone else, she said ; so what did it matter whether they could marry or not ? She would be his, at any rate, for she could never be anybody else’s.

‘ And when I go, you’ll write to me, Paul ?’ she added pleadingly.

Paul hesitated.

‘ I mustn’t,’ he cried. ‘ I oughtn’t to, Nea. Remember, we two are not engaged to each other.’

‘ We’re more than engaged,’ Nea answered boldly, with the boldness of a true woman’s heart. ‘ We’re each other’s already. Paul, I’ll write to you, and you must write to me. You have great powers, and you’ll

do good work in the world yet. In time, perhaps, you'll pay off all this weight of debt that clings like a millstone round your neck, and then you'll marry me. But, if not, we'll live for one another for ever. And I shall live happy if I know you love me.'

'One more kiss, Nea !'

'As many more as ever you like, Paul.'

## CHAPTER XXI.

### COINCIDENCES.

IN another part of the fields, meanwhile, Faith Gascoyne and Charlie Thistleton had wandered off together along a backwater of the river, in search of forget-me-nots, they said, and white water-lilies. Oh, those innocent flowers, how much they have to answer for! How many times have they not been made the excuse for such casual divagations from the straight path of Britannic chaperonage.

Thistleton had helped to row them up stream, and Faith thought she had never seen him look so handsome as he looked just then in his bright Christ Church boating-jacket, with the loose flannel shirt showing white in front where the jacket lay

open. A manly man seldom looks manlier than in boating costume. In evening clothes, to be sure, as she had seen him at Exeter concert, he was perhaps as gentlemanly ; but that was mere gloss and outward show ; the young Greek god came out more fully in the garb of athletics. Faith thought with a sigh that to-morrow her holiday would be over for ever, and she must needs go back to the vacant young men of Hillborough.

They sat down by a flood-gate on a tiny side-stream, and arranged their forget-me-nots into a respectable bundle. The flood-gate had a sluice-door in it, and the water pouring through made murmuring music. The sky was just chequered with fleecy clouds, and the wind whispered through the willows on the margin. It was all a sweet idyl to Faith's full young heart ; and Mr. Thistleton by her side was so kind and attentive.

She knew Mr. Thistleton admired her—in a way. She couldn't help seeing, as she sat there in her prettiest morning frock, that he cast eyes of delight every now and

again at her rich brown complexion and her uncommon features. For Faith Gascoyne was above everything uncommon-looking ; a certain individual stamp of distinction, half high-bred, half gipsy-like, was the greatest charm of her peculiarly cut features. And Thistleton gazed at her with almost rude admiration—at least, Faith would almost have thought it rude if it hadn't been so evidently sincere and simple-minded.

Nevertheless, when Thistleton, turning round abruptly, asked her point-blank that alarming question, 'Miss Gascoyne, do you think you could ever like me?' Faith was so completely taken by surprise that she started back suddenly, and let the forget-me-nots tumble from her hands on to the beam of the flood-gate.

'Why of course, Mr. Thistleton,' she answered, with a faint smile, 'I like you—oh, ever so much ! You're so kind and good-natured.'

'But that's not what I mean,' the blonde young man corrected hastily. 'I mean—well, Faith, I mean, do you think you could ever love me ?'



If ever a man took a woman by storm in this world it was surely this one !

There was a long pause, during which Faith picked up the forget-me-nots one by one, and arranged them together with deliberate care into a neat little bouquet. But her heart was throbbing fast all the while for all that.

At last, she looked down and whispered low, while the blonde young man waited eagerly for her answer :

‘ Mr. Thistleton, you ought never to have asked me that question at all. Consider—consider the difference in our positions.’

Thistleton looked down, a little bit crest-fallen.

‘ Well, I know it’s presumptuous of me,’ he said with a shy air, just emboldened by his eagerness. ‘ A Sheffield cutler’s son has no right to ask a—a lady of birth and rank to be his wife off-hand ; but I thought, Miss Gascoyne——’

Faith cut him short with an impatient gesture. Was this *mauvaise comédie* of her father’s baronetcy to pursue her like an

evil fate through life, even in these its supremest moments ?

‘I didn’t mean *that*,’ she cried, leaning eagerly forward, and looking up at him with a little appealing glance for mercy. ‘Surely, Mr. Thistleton, you must have known yourself I didn’t mean *that*. But you are so much richer and better brought up than me, and you move in such a very different society. I—I should be ashamed myself of publicly disgracing you.’

Thistleton glanced across at her with a curiously doubtful, half-incredulous air.

‘Why, how much at cross-purposes we all live !’ he said, with a little awkward laugh. ‘I’ve been wanting all day to speak out my mind to you, and I’ve been afraid all along, for I thought you’d think me so very presuming. And I’d made up all kinds of pretty things to say to you, don’t you know, about trying to live up to your level, and all that sort of thing—because you’re so clever, and so brilliant, and so much above me in every way ; and now as soon as ever I open my mouth, you knock me down at once with a regular stunning back-hander like that,

and I don't know where on earth to begin or go on again. I can't remember what I meant to say to you. I thought if, after I took my degree, and went to the Bar in London—my father wants me to go to the Bar, just as a nominal thing, you see, because it's so very respectable; but, of course, he'll make me a handsome allowance for all expenses—I thought, if I lived in town, and kept up a good establishment, and made a home fit for you, you might perhaps, when you got to know me a little better, think me not quite altogether beneath you. And, to tell you the truth, Miss Gascoyne, to make security doubly sure, I wrote to my father day before yesterday, telling him everything about your brother and yourself, and saying that I thought of venturing to ask you to marry me, and I got this telegram in reply from my people last night—you can see it if you like, it's rather long of its sort: my father's always just a trifle extravagant in the matter of telegraphing.'

Faith bit her lip as she took the telegram from the blonde young man; the whole

thing, in spite of her agitation, was so supremely ridiculous ! ‘ Your mother and I have read your letter with satisfaction and pleasure,’ the telegram said, ‘ and are delighted to see you think of looking so high in that matter. We are gratified at the choice you have made of companions, and now in another more important relation. It would be a very proud thing for us if at the close of our career, which has been long and prosperous, we could see our dear boy the brother-in-law of a man of title. You may be sure we would do everything to make you both happy. Don’t delay on any account to ask the young lady as soon as possible, if a fitting occasion for doing so should arise. And if she accepts you, take any credit necessary to make her a suitable present of whatever object you think desirable. Let us know the lady’s answer at once by telegram.’

Faith handed it back to him with a burning face. Her hands trembled.

‘ It’s all so strange to me,’ she murmured, bewildered.

‘ At any rate,’ Thistleton cried, ‘ your

objection's answered beforehand, you see. So far as any difference in position goes, both my parents and I looked at that question exactly opposite from the way you look at it.'

'I see,' Faith answered, looking down all fiery red, and with her soul one troubled whirlwind within her.

'Then what do you answer me?' Thistleton asked, taking her hand in his. 'Faith—may I call you Faith?—you struck me so dumb by taking such a topsy-turvy view of our relations, that I hadn't got words to tell you what I wanted. But I love you, Faith, and I want you to marry me.'

Faith let her hand lie unresistingly in his, but turned away her face, still hot and fiery. 'You—you are very kind, Mr. Thistleton,' she answered.

'But that's not what I want,' Thistleton put in, leaning forward once more. 'Faith, I want you to tell me you're ready to marry me.'

'No,' Faith answered resolutely. 'I can't. Never, never, never!'

‘Why?’ Thistleton asked, dropping her hand all at once. She let it hang idle at her side as if sorry he had dropped it.

‘Because—I mustn’t,’ Faith answered, all aglow.

‘Don’t you like me?’ Thistleton asked with a very wistful look. ‘Oh, Faith, I’ve been watching you ever since you came to Oxford, and I really began to think you did like me, just a little.’

‘I like you very much,’ Faith answered, trembling. ‘I never was—so flattered—at anything in my life as that—that you should think me worthy to marry you.’

‘Oh, don’t say that!’ the young man cried in a voice of genuine distress. ‘It hurts me to hear you talk like that. It’s so upside down, somehow. Why, Faith, I lay awake trembling all last night, wondering how I could ever venture to ask you—you who are so beautiful, and good, and clever. I was afraid to speak to you. Only my love could have emboldened me to speak. And when I *did* ask you at last, I blurted it out point-blank like a schoolboy, because I felt you so much above me that I hardly

dared to mention such a thing in your presence.'

Faith smiled a troubled smile. 'You're very good,' she said. 'I like you ever so much, Mr. Thistleton. I should like to sit here with you—always.'

'Then why won't you marry me?' Thistleton cried eagerly.

Faith pulled about the forget-me-nots ostentatiously once more. 'I hardly know myself yet,' she answered. 'It's all so new. It's come as such a surprise to me. I haven't had time to collect my thoughts. I only know in a dim sort of a way that it's quite, quite impossible.'

'Don't you think you could love me?' Thistleton asked very low.

Faith looked at him as he sat there in his manly boating suit—so much more of a man than anybody she had ever before dreamt of—and then she thought of the Infants.

'I could—like you a great deal, I'm sure,' she answered slowly. 'It isn't that, Mr. Thistleton. It isn't that at all. If—if I yielded to my own heart,' she spoke

very low, 'perhaps I might say to you *Yes* at once——'

Before she could finish her sentence she felt an arm placed boldly round her shapely waist, and two eager lips pressed hard against hers. She rather fancied Mr. Thistleton was kissing her. 'If you say as much as that,' the blonde young man cried out triumphantly, 'you have said all. I don't mind any more now. Faith, Faith, you belong to me.'

Faith struggled to be free so hard that Thistleton let her go and sat looking at her admiringly. 'Mr. Thistleton,' she said with quiet dignity, 'you must never do that again. I like you very much, but I told you just now I can never marry you.'

'And I asked you why,' Thistleton retorted with the audacity begotten of love; 'and you'd no good reason to give me; so I say, on the contrary, you'll have to marry me.'

Faith drew a long breath and pulled herself together. The reasons why it was impossible came clearer to her now. They dawned slowly on her mind. She leaned



back and explained them one by one to Thistleton—her father's calling; the family poverty; her mother's need for somebody to help her; his own future in life; the impossibility of keeping in two societies at once anywhere.

But Thistleton, with the unconscionable ardour of youth, would listen to none of these lame excuses. As for her father, he said, he was a British baronet, and what better father-in-law any member of a North-Country business house could possibly want he was at a loss to discover. As to the family poverty, that was all the more reason why the family should restore itself to its proper position by marrying into other families that had more money than brains, and more land than ancestry. When Paul came into his title—which he hoped wouldn't be for many years yet—they'd be none the prouder than they were of him now, with his cleverness, and his industry, and his fine high character.

‘But still, you know,’ he said, coming back to the one undeniable truth of logic, ‘a baronet's a baronet.’

As Faith seemed disinclined to dispute that self-evident specimen of an identical proposition, Thistleton went on to remark that Faith, if married, could do a great deal more to help her mother than in school with the Infants; that his own future would be all the more assured in society's eyes if he allied himself to a member of a titled family; and that, as his father wanted him to go into Parliament finally, he wished to have a wife who would be a credit and an aid to him in that arduous position. Finally, when Faith urged the difficulty of mixing in two societies at once, Thistleton looked her back very gravely in the face, and remarked with a solemnity that fairly made her laugh :

‘And the governor, you know, doesn’t always get his tongue quite straight round his most slippery *h*’s. Yet he might have been in Parliament more than once if he liked. Why, the floor of the House is literally strewn nowadays, they say, with the members’ aspirates.’

They sat there long, debating and fencing, Faith confident that the idea was wholly

impracticable, and Thistleton determined that Faith should say *Yes* to him. But, at last, when time had gone too far, they rose, and Thistleton fired one parting shot before rejoining Mrs. Douglas at the shore by the row-boats. 'At least,' he said, 'I suppose I may write to you?'

Faith hesitated for a moment. She couldn't forego that innocent pleasure. 'Well, yes,' she said falteringly, 'you may write to me if you like. As Mr. Solomons says, "without prejudice," you may write to me.'

The blonde young man smiled triumphant. 'Well, that settles it,' he exclaimed with delight. 'I shall telegraph back this evening to the governor.'

'And what'll you say?' Faith asked, not wholly displeased.

'The lady accepts, but defers for the present,' Thistleton answered boldly.

'But I don't accept,' Faith cried. 'Oh, you mustn't say that, Mr. Thistleton. I distinctly said *No* to you.'

The Professor came upon them before Thistleton could reply. 'My dear young

truants,' he said, beaming hard on Faith through his benevolent *pince-nez*, 'where on earth have you been hiding yourselves? I come as ambassador from the court of Mrs. Grundy. My wife has been looking for you any time this half-hour.'

As they rowed home that evening, down the calm blue stream, everybody noticed that Isabel Boyton, who was one of the guests, had lost her irrepressible good spirits for once, and seemed tired and moody. She sat silent in the stern, with her arm round Nea Blair's waist, and hardly even flashed out a saucy retort when the Professor chaffed her upon her unexpected taciturnity.

But when she reached her rooms at the Mitre, in the dusk, that night, she flung her arms wildly about her mother's neck, and cried out aloud, 'Oh momma, momma, do you know what's happened? He proposed to Nea Blair to-day—and she's accepted him!'

'How do you know, darling?' her mother asked, soothing her.

‘I could see it,’ Isabel cried. ‘I’m sure of it! I know it! And oh, mamma, it was the title and the fun of the thing I thought of at first; no more than that; but, in the end, it was himself. I love him! I love him!’

Your American girl is the coquette pushed to its utmost limit. Who wants her may go; but who shows himself indifferent to her charms and dollars, she would die to win him.

That night, when Thistleton met Faith at the Christ Church concert he slipped a little packet unobtrusively into her hand. Faith would have returned it, but she couldn’t without attracting attention. She opened it in her own room, after Nea had left her—Nea, who had come with kisses and tears to bid her good-night, but not to tell her about her episode with Paul. It contained a short note—a very short note—and a tiny jeweller’s box. The note said:

‘MY DARLING FAITH,

‘I was always a dutiful and obedient son, and I’ve felt compelled to-night to obey

my father's instructions. He said I was to buy you a suitable present, and I send it herewith. I might have chosen a diamond or something of the sort, but then I know you wouldn't have worn it. This little ring will be more really serviceable.

‘ Your own grateful and devoted,

‘ C. H. T.

‘ P.S.—Enclosed telegram just arrived from Sheffield.’

Faith looked at the ring. It was simple and pretty enough ; but what she liked best was his thoughtfulness in sending her those five small pearls instead of anything more showy and therefore more unsuitable. Then she turned to the telegram :

‘ We congratulate you warmly. We are pleased and proud. Please send a photograph.’

## CHAPTER XXII.

### MISS BOYTON PLAYS A CARD.

NEXT morning, as Nea was busy packing, Faith burst unexpectedly into her room with a sudden impulse. To say the truth, girl that she was, she couldn't resist the temptation of showing Nea her ring, though she said nothing as yet about the note that accompanied it. Nea admired it with a placid sigh. It would be long before Paul could give *her* such a ring. Not that she wanted one, of course : nobody was less likely to think that than Nea ; but, then, poor Paul must feel the difference so keenly !

She folded up the dress that lay stretched on the bed, and laid it neatly into her small portmanteau. Faith glanced at it all at once with a sharp glance of surprise.

‘Why, Nea,’ she cried, taking it out once more and holding it in her hand, ‘whatever do you call this, you bad, bad creature?’

Nea blushed a guilty blush of conscious shame. She was caught in the act—fairly found out. It was an evening-dress she had never worn all the time she was at Oxford.

Faith looked down into the portmanteau once more, and there in its depths caught a passing glimpse of yet another one.

‘Oh, Nea,’ she cried, half tearful with vexation, taking it out in turn, ‘this is really too wicked of you. You had these two nice evening gowns here all the time, and you’ve only worn the old cashmere ever since you’ve been here on purpose not to be better dressed than I was!’

Nea gazed at these two mute witnesses to her guilt with an uncomfortable glance. Her tender little conscience would have smitten her greatly had she allowed that simple explanation of Faith’s to pass unqualified.

‘It wasn’t altogether that,’ she answered, fixing her eyes on the carpet. ‘It was



partly on your account, Faith, I don't deny, that I wouldn't wear them; but partly, also'—she hesitated for a second—'to tell you the truth, I didn't want—your brother to think I was—well—so very much more expensively dressed than you were.'

She said it so simply that Faith guessed the rest, and made no answer save to fling her arms round Nea's neck and kiss her passionately. For now, she felt, they were almost sisters.

They drove to the station together, and went up—both third—in the same train to Paddington. There they parted; Nea to Cornwall, Faith to Waterloo, for Hillborough and the Infants.

Her dream was over. She must go back now to the workaday world again.

But always with that ring and note in her pocket. For she dared not wear the ring; that would attract attention. Still, what a difference it made to her life! It would sweeten the days with the Infants to feel it furtively from time to time. It would bring the dream back to her, and she would work the more easily.

Thistleton and Paul had come down to see them off at the station, and with them Miss Boyton and her inseparable momma. Poor Isabel couldn't deny herself the pleasure of watching her victorious rival safe out of Oxford, and waving her a farewell from Paul's side on the platform. Not out of any ill-will or unkindness—of that Isabel was wholly incapable—but simply as a sort of salve to her own feelings. Nea had engaged Paul's heart, and Isabel accepted her defeat with good grace. Not only did she bear Nea no grudge for having thus wholly ousted her, but she kissed her a kiss of exceptional tenderness, and pressed her hand with a friendly pressure as she entered the carriage. Nea knew what the kiss and the pressure meant. Among women words are very seldom necessary to pass these little confidences from one to the other.

From the station Isabel walked back to the Mitre with Thistleton, allowing her momma to take possession of Paul. She had reasons of her own for this peculiar arrangement. She wanted, in fact, to apply

once more that familiar engine, the common pump, to Thistleton. And the blonde young man, being by nature a frank and confiding personage, was peculiarly susceptible to the pumping operation.

When they reached the Mitre, Isabel deposited the obedient momma in her own room.

‘I’m going a turn round the meadows with Mr. Thistleton,’ she said abruptly.

‘You’ve a lecture at twelve, Thistleton, haven’t you?’ Paul asked, anxious to spare his friend Miss Boyton’s society if he didn’t want it.

‘Oh, I’ll cut the lecture!’ Thistleton answered good-humouredly. ‘It’s Aristotle’s *Ethics* ; and I dare say Aristotle don’t mind being cut. He must be used to it now, after so many centuries. Besides, a just mean between excessive zeal and undue negligence was his own ideal, you know. He should be flattered by my conscientious carrying out of his principles. I haven’t missed a lecture for a whole week now. I think it’s about time I should begin to miss one.’

For, in fact, the blonde young man vaguely

suspected, from what Isabel had told him on her way from the station, she hoped to benefit the Gascoyne family, and taking now a profound interest in all that concerned that distinguished house, of which, in spite of Faith's disclaimer, he almost considered himself at present a potential member, he was anxious to learn what her scheme might be, and to see how far it might be expected to lighten the burden of the family difficulties. Isabel, however, was too thoroughbred an American to let Thistleton see too much of her own intentions. She led him dexterously to the round seat in Christ Church meadows that overlooks the Cherwell, and, seating him there at close quarters, proceeded to work the pump-handle with equal skill and vigour. She succeeded so well that even Armitage himself, that past master in the art of applied hydrostatics, could hardly have surpassed her. At the end of an hour she had got out of Thistleton almost all he knew about the strange compact between the Gascoynes and Mr. Solomons. Motives of delicacy, indeed, restrained the blonde young man from mentioning the nature of the security on which

Mr. Solomons reposed his hopes of ultimate repayment—Paul's chance of marrying an heiress. He thought such a disclosure might sound a trifle personal, for the name and fame of Isabel's prospective dollars had been noised abroad far and wide both in Mentone and in Oxford. Nor did he allude in passing to his own possible future relations with the heir-apparent to the baronetcy and his handsome sister. Other personal motives tied his tongue there ; while as to the state of affairs between Nea and Paul he knew or guessed far less than Isabel herself did. But with these few trifling exceptions, he allowed the golden-haired Pennsylvanian to suck his brains of all his private acquaintance with the Gascoyne affairs, being thoroughly convinced, like an innocent, good young man that he was, that Isabel could desire this useful knowledge for no other purpose than to further the designs of the Gascoyne family. If Madame Ceriolo had got hold of a young man like Thistleton she might have twisted him round her little finger, and used his information to very bad account ; fortunately, the American heiress had no plans in

her head but such as deserved the unsuspecting undergraduate's most perfect confidence.

When Isabel had sucked her orange quite dry, she rose at last, and remarking in the cheerful American tone of virginal discovery, 'It must be getting on for one: I feel like lunching,' led the way back direct to the city.

As soon as she found herself in her own room at the Mitre, however, she took out a small russia-leather notebook from her pocket, and entered in it, with a neat gold pencil-case, and not without some rising tears, three short memoranda: 'Judah Solomons, High Street, Hillborough, Surrey. Faith Gascoyne, 5, Plowden's Court. Drexel, Morgan and Co., Bankers, Paris.'

Then she dried her eyes with a clean white handkerchief, hummed a cheerful tune for a minute or two to herself to restore her spirits, and having satisfied herself in the glass that all traces of recent weeping had disappeared, descended, smiling, to her mamma in the coffee-room.

'On Toosday,' she said to her mother with

an abstracted air, as they sat down to a lunch of Transatlantic splendour, 'I shall go back to London. Appears to me as if I'd had about enough now of these Oxford Colleges. There's too many of 'em at once. They run into the monotonous.'

'Very well, Izzy,' her mother responded dutifully.

And on Tuesday morning, in real earnest, they were back again once more, with all their boxes, at Hatchett's Hotel in Piccadilly.

That afternoon as Isabel, somewhat disconsolate, strolled along Bond Street, she saw a familiar figure steering its way towards her loungily on the opposite side of the street. The figure was attired in a faultless frock-coat and a shiny tall hat, and was booted, gloved, and cuffed to match with irreproachable exactitude. As a faint smile began to develop itself by premonition on Isabel's countenance, the figure displayed some momentary symptoms of nascent hesitation, not unmixed with an evident tendency to turn away, without the appearance of observing her, into Burlington Gardens.

Miss Boyton might be very good fun on the Promenade du Midi, but was she quite the right sort of person to acknowledge in Bond Street? The authority on the meaning of the word 'scallywag' had his doubts on the subject.

Before he could carry his hesitancy into effect, however, Isabel had darted promptly across the street with American irrepressibility, and was shaking the limp gloved hand with good-humoured fervour.

'Oh my! Mr. Armitage,' she said, 'how funny I should meet you—you of all people in the world, right here in London!'

Armitage drew himself up with stiff politeness.

'One usually does expect to meet one's friends in Bond Street,' he retorted with dignity. 'And, indeed, I was here this very afternoon on the look-out for another old Mentone acquaintance whom I often meet about these parts. I mean Madame Ceriolo.'

'Oh, she's in London, is she?' Isabel asked with languid interest.

'Well, yes, she's in London,' Armitage



answered cautiously. 'Where, I don't know; perhaps it would be wisest not to inquire too deep. Madame Ceriolo's movements should be judged, I take it, with tolerant leniency. But she amuses me, you know—she undoubtedly amuses me.' He spoke with a marked apologetic tone, as who feels half ashamed of his own undeveloped taste. 'I like to meet her and have a little chat with her now and again. She gives me a fillip. After all, one can forgive much to a person who amuses you.'

'I guess that's about what we all want out of one another in this vale of tears,' Isabel answered frankly.

'The philosophy of life in a nutshell,' Armitage retorted, reassured. 'And really, in her way, the little woman's quite presentable.'

'Oh, quite presentable,' Isabel answered, smiling.

'So why shouldn't one know her?' Armitage went on, with the timid air of a man who desires to be backed up in a heretical opinion. 'I mean to find her out and look her up, I think. And you, Miss Boyton, what have

*you* been doing with yourself since you left Mentone ?

The devil entered into Isabel Boyton (as he frequently does into her saucy fellow-countrywomen) and prompted her to respond with incisiveness :

‘ I’ve been up to Oxford, to see the scallywag.’

‘ No ?’ Armitage cried with a look of profound interest. ‘ And tell me, Miss Boyton, what did you see or hear there ?’

Isabel took a cruel revenge for his desire to avoid her.

‘ I saw Nea Blair,’ she said, ‘ who was stopping at a house in Oxford with Faith Gascoyne, the scallywag’s sister ; and we went out a great deal together, and saw Mr. Gascoyne and Mr. Thistleton, and a great many more. And no end of engagements and things have happened ; and there’s lots of news ; but I’m so sorry I’m busy. I must call a hack !’

And, quick as thought, she hailed a hansom, and left the poor scandalmonger lifting his hat, alone on the pavement, tantalized.

It was a cruel revenge, but perhaps he deserved it.

Armitage would have given five pounds that moment to know all about these rumoured engagements.

Had that fellow Gascoyne succeeded in bagging the American heiress who was so sweet upon him at Mentone? And had Thistleton fallen a victim to the seeming innocence of Nea Blair? He rather suspected it. These innocent bread-and-butter misses often know at any rate, on which side their bread's buttered. So, twenty minutes later, Armitage was expounding both apocryphal engagements to little Madame Ceriolo, whom he happened to run up against, quite by accident, of course, near the corner of Piccadilly. And little Madame Ceriolo, smiling her most winning smile, remarked confidentially that it's often the women of the world, whom everybody suspects, that have after all the most profound and disinterested affections.

As she said so, she looked most meaningly at Armitage.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

‘MOMMA,’ Miss Isabel Boyton remarked at breakfast on Wednesday morning, balancing a fragment of sole on the end of her fork, as she glanced up sideways, ‘you needn’t worry to expect me to lunch to-day. I’m going out by myself, and I mayn’t be back till somewhere near dinner-time. If you happen to be loafing around anywhere about Bond Street, I dare say you’ll pick up Mr. Armitage ; he’s there most all the time—afternoons, he says. But if you don’t, I guess you can drop in and look at the National Gallery, or something instructive and entertaining, most as well without me.’

Mrs. Boyton helped herself to a third poached egg and some more broiled ham—

she had the usual surprising appetite of the sallow American dyspeptic—as she answered meekly :

‘ Yes, indeed, Izzy. I’ve got to mail my letters to your poppa this morning, and after lunch I’ll fix myself up and sit out in the Park a bit.’

Miss Isabel went up to her own room, and consulted Bradshaw. The high mathematical training she had received at the Harrisburg Lyceum enabled her in less than half an hour to arrive at the abstruse fact that a train for Hillborough left Victoria Station at 11.5, and that a return train might be expected at 3.17 or at 4.50. Armed with these data, and with the consciousness of virtue, she summoned a hansom—it was one of the chief joys of London in Isabel Boyton’s eyes to ‘ ride a hansom ’ from place to place—and commanded her driver to take her ‘ right away ’ to Victoria.

Arrived at the station which bore that regal and imperial name (Isabel did just love these faint echoes of royalty, resonant through the length and breadth of modern England), she went into the telegraph-office

and framed a hasty cablegram, in the imperative mood, addressed to Sylvanus P. Boyton, Philadelphia, Pa. — which last mysterious addition had reference, not to Mr. Boyton's respected parental relation towards herself, but to his local habitation in the State of Pennsylvania. The message itself was pithy and to the point :

‘Open me a credit for three thousand pounds sterling at once at Drexel and Morgan's, Paris.

‘ ISABEL BOYTON.’

“ ‘Honour your father and mother's ” gone out of date,’ Mr. Sylvanus Boyton remarked, in his counting-house at Philadelphia, when he received that cablegram four hours earlier (by American time), ‘and “Honour your sons’ and daughters’ cheques” has come in instead of it!’ But he understood his duty in his own generation, for all that, for he telegraphed without delay, ‘Have advised Drexel, Morgan, according to wish. You seem to be going it.’

And going it Miss Isabel undoubtedly was, in her own unconventional American fashion.

At Hillborough Station she found but a single cab in attendance. This she hailed at once, and observed in a confidential tone to the driver, 'I want you to drive me to Mr. Solomons', Auctioneer and Estate Agent somewhere in the High Street ; but please, in going, don't pass a place called Plowden's Court, if you can possibly help it, and don't go near the school where Miss Gascoyne teaches. I don't want her to know I've come to Hillborough.'

The driver smiled a curiously knowing smile ; and his right eye was with difficulty prevented from winking ; but he was a discreet man, as is the wont of cabmen—those involuntary depositories of so many other folks' secrets—so he answered merely, 'All right, miss ; I understand !' with an air as confidential as Isabel's own, and drove her forthwith to the dingy, stingy little stuccoed house in the old-fashioned High Street, without further comment.

Mr. Solomons was in somewhat low spirits that morning. Things generally had been using him very hard. A debtor against whom he had obtained a judgment summons

had 'sold up' so ill that barely enough remained, after expenses paid, to cover the principal of Mr. Solomons' debt, let alone the interest. Great Occidental Shares which he held for a rise had fallen yesterday five-eighths to three-quarters. His nephew Lionel, whom he supplied so liberally, had written again to ask for more. And, to crown all, sitting clumsily down himself with all his weight of care, he had broken an office stool value three and a penny, which would have to be replaced by a fresh article from the carpenter's. These accumulated misfortunes told heavily upon Mr. Solomons. He was distinctly out of sorts, and he would have been glad of an excuse to vent his ill-humour, if occasion turned up, upon some fitting object.

Nevertheless, when he saw a pretty young lady with golden hair—slim, too slim for Mr. Solomons' Oriental taste, but still distinctly good-looking, and dressed with the nameless incommunicable charm of American plutocracy—descend at his own door and enter his office, doubtless on business-thoughts intent, professional spirit rose



so triumphant in Mr. Solomons' breast that he advanced to meet the pretty young lady, smiling a smile of ten house-and-estate-agent power of persuasion. He saw in her, with the eye of faith, that valuable acquisition to the professional man, a new client. The new client was probably come to inquire for a furnished villa at Hillborough for the summer season. Mr. Solomons had always many such inquiries in July and August.

The young lady, however, declined the suggestion of wanting a house. She was in a hurry, she said—in a very great hurry; might she speak with Mr. Solomons half an hour—alone—on strictly private business?

Mr. Solomons rose and led the way upstairs with a beating heart. Sixty years of resolute bachelorhood had made him wary. Could the lady's little game by any possibility be breach of promise? He trembled at the idea. If only Leo were here now to listen unobtrusively and act as witness through the medium of the keyhole! But to face her alone, unsupported even by the office-boy's evidence—the bare notion of such damages

as the Court might award was really too appalling.

The young lady, however, soon set his doubts on that score at rest. She went straight to the point with Transatlantic directness. Mr. Solomons had certain bonds, notes, or acceptances of Mr. Paul Gascoyne's, of Christ Church, Oxford. How much were they for? And what would Mr. Solomons take, in a lump, for them?

At this astounding proposition, fired off at his head point-blank, without explanation or introduction, without even a knowledge of the young lady's name, Mr. Solomons' breath came and went painfully, and a curious conflict of doubt and hope took possession of his bosom. He was a business man, and he must know more about this offer before he even admitted the existence of the bonds. Who knew but that the strange young lady wanted to rob and murder him!

So Mr. Solomons temporized. By long and slow degrees he drew out of Isabel the various facts that she was a rich American; that she had met Paul Gascoyne at Mentone and Oxford; that she wished to get the

bonds into her own hands; and that, apparently, she was well disposed towards the parties of the first part in those valuable documents. On the other hand, he gathered, by various suggestive side-hints, that the young lady was not aware of the precise position of Paul's father, beyond the fact that he was a baronet of the United Kingdom in very small circumstances; and, further, that she had no sort of authority from Paul himself to make any offer whatsoever for the documents in question. She was prepared to buy them, she said, for their fair money value in prompt cash, and she would engage to cause the parties of the first part no unnecessary trouble in the matter of repayment.

Mr. Solomons' heart, like the Homeric hero's, was divided two ways within him at this singular application. He had never concealed from himself, and his nephew Lionel had certainly not concealed from him, the painful fact that these bonds were a very doubtful and problematical security. He had ventured much on a cock-and-bull scheme—a little private mare's-nest of his own

invention ; and he had trembled for years for his precious money. And here, now, was the very heiress, the *deus ex machina* (or *dea*, if we must speak by the card, lest equivocation undo us), who was to relieve him from all his financial follies, and justify his daring, and marry Paul, and make repayment certain. Nay, more than that, as Mr. Solomons read the problem, the heiress was even prepared to pay up beforehand, in order to relieve her future husband from the weight of debt, and put him in a better way, no doubt, for building up for himself a position in life and society. Mr. Solomons held his double chin between finger and thumb as he pondered deeply. A very strong bait, no doubt, this offer of prompt cash—a very strong bait indeed to human cupidity.

And yet two other feelings rose powerful at once in Mr. Solomons' mind — two strange, deep feelings. The first was this: If here was the heiress who indeed was ready to marry Paul, and save him at once from all his struggles and difficulties, why should Mr. Solomons let her discount him, as it were, at present value, and so get him

cheap, when, by holding on till the end, and selling dear, he would reap the full benefit himself of his long investment? What's the use of embarking in a doubtful speculation if you don't expect to get well repaid, cent. per cent., in the end for it? How foolish to get frightened with land in sight, so to speak, and forego the harvest of your own wise adventurousness! Why, Mr. Solomons would like to hold on, if for nothing else, in order to show his nephew Leo he was wrong after all, and that Paul would book his heiress at last, and pay up, like a young man of honour as he was, to the uttermost farthing. Twenty per cent. and annual renewals, with discount off for the extra risk to start with—and to the uttermost farthing.

And the second feeling? Ah, that Mr. Solomons hardly even admitted to his own soul. He would have been ashamed, as a business man, to admit it. But it was there nevertheless, vague and undetermined, a genuine sentiment, in some undercurrent of consciousness. Had he not conceived all this scheme himself, and risked his solid cash on

the chimerical proposition? Was it not he who had put Paul to school and college, and thus acquired, as it were, a proprietary interest in him? Wasn't Paul's success in life his own business now? Had he backed it so long, and would he hedge at the last moment in favour of a stranger? And what stranger? Whatever did he know of this queer young lady, who had dropped down upon him from the clouds, with her brusque, sharp manners and her eager American promptitude? Why sell Paul's future to her or to anyone? Was not Paul his by right of investment, and should not he run him on his own account, to win or to lose, as the chances of the game of life would have it? The gambling spirit was strong in Mr. Solomons, after all. Having backed his horse, he liked to stand by him like a thoroughgoing sportsman. No hedging for him. And a certain sneaking human regard for Paul made him say to himself, 'Why hand him over, bound body and soul, to a golden-haired young lady from parts unknown, whose motives for buying him of me are, after all, doubtful?'

So he stared at Isabel hard as he opened his safe and took out the precious documents with trembling fingers. Then he said, 'The total sum up to date comes to a trifle over fifteen hundred pounds sterling.'

'Only fifteen hundred!' Isabel cried with a start. 'And he makes all that fuss over fifteen hundred pounds! Why, say, Mr. Solomons, I'll give you two thousand, money down, for the lot, and we'll make it a bargain.'

Mr. Solomons drew a deep breath and hesitated. Four hundred and seventy odd pounds clear profit—besides the compound interest at twenty per cent.—was more than his fondest wish had ever anticipated. Such a young woman as that, properly worked, would indeed be a perfect mine of wealth for a capitalist to draw upon. He looked at her long, and his heart faltered. Four hundred and seventy odd pounds! 'Well, what do you want them for?' he asked at last, cautiously.

'That's my business, I guess,' Isabel answered with sharp incisiveness. 'To burn 'em if I choose, perhaps. When I

buy things at a store, I don't usually expect to tell the drygoodsman what I want to do with 'em.'

Mr. Solomons eyed her with an inquisitive look. 'Let's be plain and aboveboard with one another,' he said. 'Do you intend to marry him?'

'Oh my, no!' Isabel answered at once, with a prompt decision that carried conviction in its very tone immediately.

Mr. Solomons was nonplussed. 'You don't want to marry him!' he exclaimed, taken aback.

'No, I ain't going to marry him,' Isabel answered stoutly, just altering the phrase into closer accord with the facts of the case, but otherwise nodding a bland acquiescence. 'I ain't going to marry him, I give you my word, Mr. Solomons.'

'Then, what *do* you want?' Mr. Solomons asked, all amazed.

'I want those papers,' Isabel answered with persistence.

Mr. Solomons rose, faltered for a second, replaced them in their pigeon-hole with a decided air, locked the safe, and put the key in



his pocket. Then he turned round to Isabel with a very gracious smile, and observed politely :

‘ Have a glass of wine, miss ?’

It was his mode of indicating with graceful precision that the question between them was settled—in the negative.

Against the rock of that decisive impassive attitude the energetic little American broke herself in wild foam of entreaties and expostulations, all in vain. She stormed, begged, prayed, and even condescended to burst into tears, but all to no purpose. Mr. Solomons, now his mind was once made up, remained hard as adamant. All she could obtain from Mr. Solomons was the solemn promise that he would keep this fruitless negotiation a dead secret from Paul and Faith, and would never even mention the fact of her visit to Hillborough. Thus reassured, the kind-hearted little Pennsylvanian dried her eyes, and, refusing in return to make Mr. Solomons the confidant of her name, descended the stairs once more, wondering and disappointed.

‘ Shall I call you a cab, miss ?’ Mr.

Solomons asked politely as he went down by her side.

‘Thank you, I’ve gotten one waiting,’ Isabel answered, trying hard to look unconcerned. ‘Will you tell the man to drive to the best place in the village where I can get something to eat?’ For Americans wot not of the existence of towns—to them everything that isn’t a city is a mere village.

But when Mr. Solomons saw the driver of Isabel’s cab, he gave a sudden little start of surprise, and exclaimed involuntarily, ‘Why, bless my soul, Gascoyne, it’s you, is it? The young lady wants to be driven to the Golden Lion.’

Isabel Boyton drew back, herself surprised in her turn. ‘You don’t mean to say,’ she cried, looking hard at the cabman, ‘this is Mr. Gascoyne’s father?’

Mr. Solomons nodded a nod of acquiescence. Isabel gazed at him with a good hard stare, as one gazes at a new wild beast in the Zoo, and then held out her hand frankly. ‘May I shake hands with you?’ she said. ‘Thank you very much. You see, it’ll be something for me to tell my friends when I get back home

to America that I've shaken hands with an English baronet.'

At the Golden Lion she paused as she paid him.

'You're a man of honour, I suppose?' she said, hesitating slightly.

And the English baronet answered with truth, 'I 'opes I are, miss.'

'Then I trust you, Mr. Gascoyne, Sir Emery, or whatever else it ought to be,' she went on seriously. 'You won't mention either to your son or your daughter that you drove an American lady to-day to Mr. Solomons' office.'

The English baronet touched his hat respectfully. 'Not if I was to die for it, miss,' he answered with warmth; for the honest grasp of Isabel's hand had touched some innermost chord of his nature till it resounded strangely.

But Isabel went in to gulp down her lunch with a regretful sense of utter failure. She hadn't succeeded in making things easier, as she had hoped, for Paul and Nea.

And the English baronet and Mr. Solomons kept their troth like men. Paul

and Faith never knew Isabel Boyton had visited Hillborough, and Mr. Solomons himself never learnt the name of his mysterious little golden-haired American visitor.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### HONOURS.

THE rest of that term at Oxford was a dull one for Paul. As soon as Faith and Nea 'went down' (to use the dear old Oxford phrase) he set to work with redoubled vigour at his reading, and went in at last for his final examination. Upon that examination much, very much, depended. If only he could gain a First, he would stand a fair chance in time for a Fellowship; and a Fellowship would allow him leisure to look around and to lay his plans for slowly repaying Mr. Solomons. But if he succeeded merely in attaining a Second or Third, his prospects of a Fellowship would be greatly decreased, and with them the probability of his shaking off that load of

debt that clogged and oppressed him in all his schemes for the future.

He knew, of course, that the necessity for taking pupils during his undergraduate years told heavily against him. No man can row in two boats at once ; and the time he had used up in reading with Thistleton and his other pupils had been so much subtracted from the time he ought to have devoted to his own reading. Still, he was able, undeniably able ; and little disposed to overestimate his own powers as he was, he had, nevertheless, a dim consciousness in his own soul that, given even chances, he was more than a match for most of his contemporaries. He had worked hard, meanwhile, to make up for lost time ; and he went into the examination cheered and sustained by the inspiring thought that Nea Blair's eyes were watching his success or failure from afar in Cornwall.

Day after day he worked and wrote in these dreary schools ; deep in Aristotle, Plato, Grote, and Mommsen. Night after night he compared notes with his competitors, and marked the strong or weak points of

their respective compositions. As time went on his spirits rose higher. He was sure he was doing himself full justice in his papers. He was sure what he had to say upon most of the questions asked in the schools was more original and more philosophical than the ideas and opinions of any of his neighbours. He felt quite at ease about his success now. And if only once he could get his First, he was pretty sure of a Fellowship, and of some chance at least of repaying Mr. Solomons.

At last the examination was over, the papers sent in, and nothing remained but that long, weary delay while the examiners are glancing over the tops of the answers and pretending to estimate the relative places of the candidates. Paul waited and watched with a yearning heart. How much hung for him on the issue of that dreaded class-list!

On the day when it came out, nailed up according to Oxford wont on the doors of the schools, he stole into the quadrangle half an hour late—he couldn't bear to be there with the first eager rush—and looked

among the G's in the First Class for the name of Gascoyne.

It was with a thrill of surprise—only surprise at first—that he noticed the list went straight from Galt to Groves; there was no Gascoyne at all in the place where he expected it. He rubbed his eyes and looked again. Surely some mistake; for the names go in each class in alphabetical order. G-a-l, G-a-s, G-r-o. Had they misspelt it somehow? Then, all at once, the truth flashed across his mind in a horrible revelation. The truth, or part of it. His name wasn't put in the First Class at all! He must have taken a Second!

For a moment he could hardly believe his eyes. It was all too strange, all too incredible. He had worked so hard, he had deserved it so well! But still he must face the worst like a man. He fixed his glance steadily on the Second Class. Far-ington, Flood, Galbraith, Girdlestone. He rubbed his eyes once more. Was he going mad on the spot? Or had the examiners neglected to place him altogether?

With a vague sinking feeling about his



left breast, he glanced down yet lower to where the Third Class filled up its two much longer columns. About half-way down, his eye caught his own name with that miraculous rapidity which enables one always to single out those familiar words on a printed page from a thousand others. 'Gascoyne, Paulus, ex Æde Christi.' Yes, yes, it was too true. There was no denying it. A Third—the lowest of all classes in Honours—was all he had got for all his toil and trouble !

He reeled as he stood, sick—sick with disappointment.

How had it happened? Who knows? Who can say? It's the greatest mistake in the world to suppose the best men always come uppermost. If a board of Third Class men in after-life were to examine their examiners, it is highly probable they might often turn the tables on the dons who misplaced them. *Humanum est errare*, and examiners are human. They often make blunders, like all the rest of us, and they added one more to that long list of mistakes when they gave Paul Gascoyne a Third in Finals.

The fact is, Paul was original ; and Oxford,

like Mr. Peter Magnus, hates originality. A decorous receptivity is what it most prefers. It likes a human mind to be modelled on the phonographic pattern—prompt to take in exactly what it is told, and ready to give it out once more, precisely as inspired, whenever you turn the barrel on again by pressing the handle. In Paul's essays, the examiners detected some flavour of ideas which appeared to them wholly unfounded on any opinions set forth by Professor Jowett or Mr. T. H. Green, of Balliol ; and, shocked at this revolt from established usage, they relegated their author to a Third Class, accordingly.

But Paul for the moment knew none of these things. He was only aware that a crushing blow had fallen upon him unexpectedly ; and he went back inconsolable to his own rooms in Peckwater, where he sported his oak, or big outer door, flung himself passionately into his easy-chair, and had his bad hour alone by himself in unutterable misery. It was hard to have worked so long and so well for so bitter a disappointment. But these things happen often, and will

happen always, as long as men consent to let themselves bemeasured by a foot-rule measurement like so many yards of brick and mortar. They are the tribute we pay to the examination Juggernaut. It crushes the best, and rolls unfelt over the bodies of the hardest.

Paul lunched alone ; he was incapable of going into Thistleton's rooms, as he often did for luncheon. But at two o'clock he heard a loud knocking at his big oak door—contrary to all established rules of University etiquette ; for when once a man fastens that outer barrier of his minor castle, he is supposed to be ill, or out of town, or otherwise engaged, and inaccessible for the time being even to his nearest and dearest intimates. However, he opened it, regardless of the breach, and found Thistleton waiting for him on the landing, very red-faced. The blonde young man grasped his hand hard with a friendly pressure.

'Gascoyne!' he cried, bursting, and hardly able to gasp with stifled indignation, 'this is just atrocious. It's wicked ; it's incredible ! I know who it was. Confound his impu-

dence! It was that beast Pringle. Let's go round to John's, and punch his ugly old head for him!

In spite of his disappointment, Paul smiled bitterly. Of what good would it be to punch the senior examiner's head, now that irrevocable class-list had once been issued?

'I wanted to be alone, Thistleton,' he said; 'it was almost more than I can bear in company. It wasn't for myself, you know, but for—for the heavy claims that weigh upon me. However, since you've come and broken my oak, let's go down the river to Sandford Lasher in a tub-pair and work it off. There's nothing like muscular effort to carry away these things. If I don't work, I feel as if I could sit down and cry like a girl. What I feel most is—the gross injustice of it.'

And gross injustice is quite inevitable as long as men think a set of meritorious and hard-working schoolmasters can be trusted to place in strict order of merit the pick and flower of intelligent young Englishmen. The vile examination system has in it nothing viler than this all but certain chance of crushing at the outset by want of success

in a foolish race, the cleverest, most vivid, and most original geniuses.

They went down the river, Thistleton still protesting his profound intention of punching Pringle's head, and as they rowed and rowed Paul gradually worked off the worst of his emotion. Then he came back, and dined alone, to try and accommodate himself to his new position. All his plans in life had hitherto been based upon the tacit assumption that he would take a First—an assumption in which he had been duly backed by all who knew him—and now that he found himself stranded on the bank with a Third instead, he had to begin and reconsider his prospects in the world, under the terrible weight of this sudden disillusionment. A Fellowship would now, no doubt, be a practical impossibility; he must turn his attention to some other opening—if any.

But the more he thought, the less he saw his way clear before him. And, in effect, what can a young man of promise, but without capital, and backed only by a Third in Greats, find to turn his hand to in these latter days in this jammed and over-

stocked realm of England? Of what practical use to him now was this costly education, for which he had mortgaged his whole future for years in advance to Mr. Solomons? The Bar could only be entered after a long and expensive apprenticeship, and even then he would in all probability do nothing but swell the noble ranks of briefless barristers. Medicine required an equally costly and tedious novitiate. From the Church he was cut off by want of sufficient faith or natural vocation. No man can become a solicitor off-hand, any more than he can become a banker, a brewer, or a landed proprietor. Paul ran over all conceivable professions rapidly in his mind, and saw none open before him save that solitary refuge of the destitute—to become a schoolmaster; and even that, with a Third in Greats for his sole recommendation, would certainly be by no means either easy or remunerative.

And then Mr. Solomons! What would Mr. Solomons say to such a move? He would never allow his *protégé* to take to schoolmastering. Mr. Solomons' ideals for him were all so different. He always figured

to himself Paul taking his proper place in society as the heir to a baronetcy, and there captivating and capturing that supposititious heiress by the charms of his person and the graces of his high-born aristocratic manners. But to become a schoolmaster ! In Mr. Solomons' eyes that would be simply to chuck away the one chance of success. What he wanted was to see Paul living in good chambers in London, and moving about among the great world, where his prospective title would mean in the end money or money's worth for him. If the heir of all the Gascoynes had to descend to the drudgery of mere schoolmastering, it would be necessary to have an explanation with Mr. Solomons ; and then—and then his father's dream must vanish for ever.

How could he ever have been foolish enough in such circumstances to speak to Nea ? His heart misgave him that he had been so unkind and so cruel. He would have bartered his eyes now if only he could undo the past. And even as he thought so, he unfastened his desk and, so weak is man, sat down to write a passionate

appeal for advice and sympathy and aid from Nea.

He could never marry her. But she would always be his. And it calmed his soul somehow to write to Nea.

As he wrote, a knock came at the sported oak—the sharp double rap that announces a telegram. He opened the door and took it from the bearer.

‘*To Paul Gascoyne, Christ Church, Oxford.*

‘Mrs. Douglas has telegraphed me result of class-list. Your disappointment is my disappointment. I feel it deeply, but send you all sympathy. You must take to literature now.

‘NEA.’

He flung himself back in his easy-chair once more, and kissed the flimsy bit of cheap paper fervently. Then, Nea had taken the trouble to arrange beforehand with Mrs. Douglas for a telegram. Nea had been puzzling her head about the self-same problems. Nea had felt for him in his day of humiliation. He would work away yet, and



clear himself for Nea. Mr. Solomons should still be paid off somehow. And sooner or later he must marry Nea.

Till that night he had never even dared to think it. But just then, in his deepest hour of despair, that bold thought came home to him as a fresh spur to effort. Impossible, incredible, unattainable as it seemed, he would pay off all, and marry Nea.

The resolve alone was worth something.

Mechanically he rose and went to his desk once more. This time he pulled out a clean sheet of foolscap. The need for an outlet was strong upon him now. He took up his pen, and almost without thinking sat down and wrote furiously and rapidly. He wrote, as he had rowed that afternoon to Sandford Lasher, in the wild desire to work off his excitement and depression in some engrossing occupation. He wrote far into the small hours of the night, and when he had finished some seven or eight closely-written foolscap sheets, he spent another long time in correcting and repolishing them. At last he got up and strolled off to bed. He had followed Nea's

advice, red-hot at the moment. He had written for dear life. All other means failing, he had taken to literature.

And that is about the way we all of us who live by the evil trade first took to it.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### COMPENSATION.

As it happened, that most terrible disappointment in all his life was probably the luckiest thing on earth that could possibly have befallen Paul Gascoyne. Had he taken a First, and then gained a Fellowship, he would doubtless have remained up at Oxford for many years to come, plodding and coaching, leading a necessarily expensive and useless life, and paying off Mr. Solomons but very slowly by long-deferred instalments out of his scanty savings. As it was, however, being thus cast adrift on the world upon his own resources, he was compelled more frankly to face life for himself, and to find some immediate paying work, which would enable him to live by hook or by crook, as best he might, over

the next six months or so. And that prompt necessity for earning his salt proved, in fact, his real salvation. Not, of course, that he gave up at once the idea of a Fellowship. He was too brave a man to let even a Third in Greats deter him from having a final fling at the hopelessly unattainable. A week later he went in for the very first vacancy that turned up, and missed it nobly, being beaten by a thick-headed Balliol Scot, who knew by heart every opinion of every recognised authority on everything earthly, from Plato and Aristotle down to John Stuart Mill and Benjamin Jowett. So having thus finally buried his only chance of University preferment before October term, Paul set to work with a brave heart to look about him manfully for some means of livelihood that might tide him over the summer vacation.

His first idea—the stereotyped first idea of every unemployed young Oxford man—was of course to get pupils. But pupils for the Long don't grow on every bush; and here again that strange divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we may, proved kindly favourable to him. Not a single as-

pirant answered his intimation, duly hung among a dozen or so equally attractive announcements on the notice-board of the Union, that 'Mr. Paul Gascoyne, of Christ Church, would be glad to read with pupils for Mods during the Long Vacation.' Thus thrown upon his beam-ends by the necessities of the case, Paul was fairly compelled to follow Nea's advice and 'take to literature.'

But 'taking to literature' is not so easy as it sounds to those who have never tried it. Everybody can write nowadays, thanks to the Board Schools, and brave the supreme difficulty of the literary profession. An open trade—a trade which needs no special apprenticeship — is always overstocked. Every gate is thronged with suitors: all the markets overflow. And so Paul hardly dared to hope even for the modest success which may keep a bachelor in bread-and-butter. Bread-and-butter is much, indeed, to expect from one's brains in these latter days, when dry bread is the lot of most literary aspirants. Little as he knew of the perils of the way, Paul trembled to think what fate might have in store for him.

Nevertheless, on the very night of his bitter disappointment over the Oxford class-list, he had sat down and written off that hasty article—a mere playful sketch of a certain phase of English life as he well knew it, for he was not without his sense of humour; and reading it over at his leisure the succeeding morning he saw that, though not quite so good as he thought it the night before, in his feverish earnestness, it was still by no means wanting in point and brilliancy. So, with much fear and trembling, he enclosed it in an envelope, and sent it off, with a brief letter commendatory, to the dreaded editor of the *Monday Remembrancer*. And then, having fired his bolt in the dark, he straightway tried to forget all about it, for fear of its entailing on him still further disappointment.

For a week or ten days he waited in vain, during which time he occupied all his spare moments in trying his 'prentice hand at yet other articles. For, indeed, Paul hardly understood himself as yet how strait is the gate and how narrow is the way by which men enter into even that outer vestibule of

journalism. He little knew how many proffered articles are in most cases 'declined with thanks' before the most modest little effusion stands a stray chance of acceptance from the journalistic magnates. Most young men think it a very easy thing to 'write for the papers.' It is only when they come to see the short shrift their own best efforts obtain from professional critics that they begin to understand how coy and shy and hard to woo is the uncertain modern Muse who presides unseen over the daily printing-press. But of all this Paul was still by rare good-luck most innocently ignorant. Had he known it all, brave and sturdy as he was, he might have fallen down and fainted perchance on the threshold.

At the end of ten days, however, to his deep delight, a letter came back from that inexorable editor—a cautious letter, neither accepting nor rejecting Paul's proffered paper, but saying in guarded, roundabout language that if Mr. Gascoyne happened to be in town any time next week the editor could spare him just twenty minutes' private conversation.

By a curious coincidence Paul *was* in town early next week, and the inexorable editor, sitting with watch open before him to keep jealous guard lest Paul might exceed the stipulated twenty minutes, expounded to him with crude editorial frankness his views about his new contributor's place in journalism.

'Have you ever written before?' the editor asked him sharply, yet with the familiar wearied journalistic air (as of a man who has sat up all night at a leader), pouncing down upon him like a hawk upon a lark, from under his bushy eyebrows.

Paul admitted with some awe, and no little diffidence, that this was his first peccadillo in that particular direction—the one error of an otherwise blameless existence.

'Of course,' the editor answered, turning over his poor foolscap with a half-contemptuous hand, 'I saw that at a glance. I read it in the style or want of style. I didn't need to be told so. I only asked by force of habit for further confirmation. Well, you know, Mr. Gascoyne, there's no use disguising the fact. You can't *write*—no, you can't



*write*—you can't write worth a kick, or anything like it!' and he snapped down his mouth with a vicious snap as one snaps a rat-trap demonstratively between one's thumb and finger.

'No?' Paul said in an interrogative voice and somewhat crestfallen, much wondering why, in that case, the busy editor, who measured his minutes strictly by the watch, had taken the trouble to send for him all the way up from Oxford.

'No, indeed you can't,' the editor answered, argumentative, like one who expects to be contradicted, but won't brook contradiction. 'Just look here at *this* now, and at *this*, and *this*,' and as he spoke the great man rapidly scored with his pencil one or two of the most juvenile faults of style in Paul's neatly-written but undeniably amateurish little essay.

Paul was forced to admit to himself, as the editor scored them, that these particular constructions were undoubtedly weak. They smelt of youth and of inexperience, and he trembled for himself as the editor went on with merciless quill to correct and alter them

into rough accordance with the *Remembrancer's* own exalted literary standard. Through the whole eight pages or so the editor ran lightly with practised pen—enlarging here, contracting there, brightening yonder—exactly as Paul had seen the tutors at Christ Church amend the false concords or doubtful quantities in a passman's faulty Latin verses. The rapidity and certainty of the editor's touch, indeed, was something surprising. Paul saw for himself, as the ruthless censor proceeded in the task, that his workmanship was really very bad. He felt instinctively how crude and youthful were his own vain attempts at the purveyance of literature. At the end, when the editor had disfigured his whole beautiful, neatly-written article with illegible scratches, cabalistic signs, and frequent alterations, the poor young man looked down at it with a sigh and half murmured below his breath :

‘ Then, of course, you don't intend to print it ?’

The editor, for all reply, sounded a small gong by his side and waited. In answer to the summons, a boy, somewhat the worse for

lamp-black, entered the august presence, and stood attentive for orders. The editor handed him the much-altered pages with a lordly wave. 'Press!' he said laconically and brushed him aside. The boy nodded, and disappeared as in a pantomime.

Then the editor glanced at his watch once more. He ran his fingers once or twice through his hair with a preoccupied air and stared straight in front of him. For a minute he hummed and mused as if alone. After that he woke up suddenly and answered with a start: 'Yes I do, though; I mean to print it—as amended. A great deal of it will have to come out, of course; but I mean to print it.'

'Thank you very much,' Paul cried, overpowered.

'And I'll tell you why,' the editor went on, never heeding his thanks—to editors all that is mere contributors' business. 'It isn't *written* a bit; oh dear no, not *written*; but it's real—it has stuff in it.'

'I'm so glad you think so,' Paul exclaimed, brightening.

The editor cut him short with a rapid wave

of his imperious pen. Editors have no time to let themselves be thanked or talked to. 'You have something to write about,' he said, 'something new and fresh. In one word, "Vous connaissez votre monde," and that's just what's wanted nowadays in journalism. We require *spécialités*. A man who knows all about the Chicago pork trade's a more useful man to us by a hundred guineas than a fellow who can write well in limpid English on any blessed subject under heaven you may set him. "Nullum tetigit quod non ornavit"—Dean Swift and the broomstick — all moonshine nowadays ! Crispness and originality are mere drugs in the market. What we want is the men who have the actual stuff in them. Now, *you* have the stuff in you. You know your world. This article shows you thoroughly understand the manners and modes of thought of the *petite bourgeoisie*.'

'I belong to them, in fact,' Paul put in, interrupting him.

The editor received the unnecessary information with polite indifference. For his part, it mattered nothing on earth to him

whether his contributor were a duke or a Manchu Tartar. What mattered was the fact that he had something to communicate. He nodded, yawned, and continued listlessly. 'Quite so,' he said. 'You understand the class. Our readers belong to a different order. They're mostly gentlefolks. You seem from your article to be a greengrocer's assistant. Therefore you've got something fresh to tell them. This is an age when society's consumed with a burning desire to understand its own component elements. Half the world wants to know, for the first time in its life, how the other half lives, just to spite the proverb. The desire's incomprehensible, but still it exists; and the journalist thrives by virtue of recognising all actualities. If you refuse to recognise the actual—like the *Planet* and the *Matutinal Herald*, for example—you go to the wall as sure as fate. Mr.—ah'm—where's your card?—ah, yes—Gascoyne, we shall want a series of a dozen or so of these articles.'

Paul hardly knew how to express his thanks. The editor cut him short with a weary wave. 'And mind,' he said, drawling,

‘no quotations from Juvenal. You’re an Oxford man, I see. Young man, if you would prosper, avoid your Juvenal. University men always go wrong on that. They can’t keep Juvenal out of modern life and newspaper leaders. You’ve no less than three tags from the Third Satire, I observe, in this one short article. Three tags from the classics at a single go would damn the best middle that ever was penned. Steer clear of them in future and try to be actual. Your articles ’ll want a great deal of hacking and hewing, of course ; I shall have to prune them, but, still, you’ve the stuff in you.’ He glanced at his watch uneasily once more. ‘The first next Wednesday,’ he went on, with a significant look towards the door. ‘I’m very busy just at present.’ His hand was fumbling nervously among his papers now. He rang the little gong a second time. ‘Proof of the “Folly of the Government,”’ he remarked to the boy. ‘Good-morning, Mr.—Gascoyne. Please don’t forget. Not later than Wednesday.’

‘Please don’t forget !’ As if it was likely, or as if he suffered from such a plethora of

work that he would fail to supply it ! Why, the very chance of such an engagement as that made him wild with excitement. And Paul Gascoyne went down the wooden steps that afternoon a happy man, and a real live journalist on the staff of the *Monday Remembrancer*.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### AN INTRODUCTION.

‘*Nemo repente fit turpissimus*’: and nobody becomes by design a journalist. Men drift into the evil trade as they drift into drink, crime, or politics—by force of circumstances. They take it up first because they’ve nothing else ready to hand to do, and they go on with it because they see no possible way of getting out of it. Paul Gascoyne, however, by way of the exception to every rule, having thus unexpectedly drifted into the first headwaters of a journalistic career, began seriously to contemplate making his work in life of it. In this design he was further encouraged by the advice and assistance of Mr. Solomons, who would have energetically protested against anything so vulgar as schoolmaster-



ing, as being likely to interfere with his plans for Paul's brilliant future, but who considered an occasional excursion into the domain of literature as by no means derogatory to the dignity even of one who was destined to become, in course of time, a real live baronet. Nay ; Mr. Solomons went so far in his commendation of the craft as to dwell with peculiar pride and pleasure on the career of a certain noble lord who was not ashamed in his day to take his three guineas a column from a distinguished weekly, and who afterwards, by the unexpected demise of an elder brother, rose to the actual dignity of a British marquissate. These things being so, Mr. Solomons opined that Paul, though born to shine in courts, might blamelessly contribute to the *Monday Remembrancer*, and might pocket his more modest guinea without compunction in such excellent company. For what company can be better than that of the Lords of the Council, endued, as we all well know them to be, with grace, wisdom, and understanding ?

Moreover, Mr. Solomons had other ideas of his own for Paul in his head. It would

be so well for Leo to improve his acquaintance with the future bearer of the Gascoyne title ; and it would be so well for Paul to keep up his connection with the house of Solomons by thus associating from time to time with Mr. Lionel. For this double-barrelled purpose Mr. Solomons suggested that Paul should take rooms in the same house with Lionel, and that they should to some extent share expenses together, so far as breakfast, lights, and firing were concerned. From which acute suggestion Mr. Solomons expected a double advantage—as the wisdom of our ancestors has proverbially phrased it, he would kill two birds with one stone. On the one hand, Paul and Lionel would naturally be thrown much into one another's society, and, on the other hand, Lionel's living expenses would be considerably diminished by Paul's co-operation.

To Paul himself the arrangement was a trifle less satisfactory. Mr. Lionel Solomons was hardly the sort of person he would have spontaneously chosen as the friend and companion of his enforced solitude. Paul's tastes and ideas had undergone a consider-

able modification at Oxford, and he was well aware of the distinctions of tone which marked off Mr. Lionel from the type of men with whom he had now long been accustomed to associate. But still, he never dreamt of opposing himself in this matter to Mr. Solomons' wishes. The habit of acquiescence in all Mr. Solomons' plans for his future had been so impressed upon his mind by constant use that he could hardly throw it off in a month or two ; and he went uncomplainingly, if not quite cheerfully, to share the hospitality of Mr. Lionel's rooms in a small back street off a Pimlico highway.

For the first few weeks Paul was busy enough, endeavouring to gain himself an entry into the world of journalism. And by great good luck his preliminary efforts were unexpectedly, and it must be confessed unwontedly, successful. As a rule, it is only by long and strenuous pushing that even good workmen succeed in making their way into that most crowded and difficult of all trades or professions. But there is luck in everything, even in journalism ; and Paul herein was exceptionally lucky. Mrs.

Douglas, feeling herself almost personally responsible for his mishap in Greats—for if only she had nobbled the examiners in time, might she not have managed to secure for him at least a decent Second?—endeavoured to make up for her remissness on that important occasion by using all her best backstairs wiles and blandishments on the persons of all the editors and leader-writers of her wide acquaintance. Now, the London press, as is well beknown to those curious in such matters, is almost entirely manned and run by Oxford graduates. Among these magnates of the journalistic world Mrs. Douglas possessed no small feminine influence; her dearest friend was married to the staff of the *Times*, and two of her second cousins were respectively engaged to the French politics of the *Planet* and the art-criticism of its *Hebdomadal Correspondent*. By dexterously employing her persuasive powers on these potent ladies, Mrs. Douglas managed to secure for Paul's maiden efforts the difficult favour of editorial consideration. The rest Paul worked on his own account. For although, as his first editor had justly re-

marked, he couldn't write worth a kick when he began his experiments, he sat down so resolutely to conquer the intricacies of English style, that before three weeks were fairly over his manuscript made as decent copy as that of many journalists to the manner born, with less brains and perception than the young Oxford postulant.

It was during these first weeks of toilsome apprenticeship that an event happened of great importance to Paul's future history, though at the moment he himself saw in it nothing more than the most casual incident of everyday existence.

One Saturday afternoon Mr. Lionel returned home early from the City, on fashionable promenade intent, and proposed to Paul to accompany him to the Park, to take the air and inspect the marriageable young ladies of this isle of Britain there on view to all and sundry. 'Let's have a squint at the girls,' indeed, was Mr. Lionel's own precise and classical suggestion for their afternoon's entertainment.

For a moment Paul demurred. 'I want to get this article finished,' he said, looking

up from his paper with a rather wearied air. 'I'm trying one on spec for the *Monthly Intelligencer*.'

'Rot!' Mr. Lionel ejaculated with profound emphasis. 'You're working too hard, Gascoyne; that's just what's the matter with you. We don't work like that in the City, I can tell you. You're muddling your brains with too much writing. Much better come out a walk with me this afternoon, and do the Park. You can't expect to hook an heiress, you know, if you don't let the heiresses see you put yourself in evidence. Besides, your article 'll be all the better for a little freshening up. You're getting dull for want of change. Come along with me to the Row, and you'll see what'll stir up your Pegasus to a trot, I'll bet you fourpence.' Even in metaphor, fourpence was Mr. Lionel's extreme extravagance in the matter of risking money needlessly.

Paul sighed a faint sigh. He had never yet dared to confide to Mr. Lionel the painful announcement that he was no longer intent on the prospective pursuit of the British heiress, but he admitted to himself

the justice of the other plea that he needed change; for, indeed, of late he had been sticking a great deal too close to the literature of his country. So, after a moment's hesitation, he rose from his desk, and, putting off his working coat, endued himself in his best editor-visiting clothes for the afternoon's stroll, and sallied forth into the street with Mr. Lionel.

As they went towards the Park, Mr. Lionel regaled his fellow-lodger with various amusing anecdotes of Mr. Solomons' cuteness, and of the care with which he audited his nephew's accounts, paying special attention to the item of sundries in the expenditure column. At these anecdotes Paul was somewhat surprised, for Mr. Solomons had always seemed to him lavish in only one respect: and that was on Mr. Lionel's personal expenses. He had fancied, indeed—and he still continued to fancy—that Mr. Solomons spoilt his nephew. That was not Mr. Lionel's own opinion, however. He descanted much upon his uncle's 'closeness,' and upon his want of sympathy with a fellow's natural wish to 'see life.'

‘Never mind, though,’ Mr. Lionel remarked at last, with a significant gesture of his protruding lips. ‘The two old men’ll drop off before long; and then, ‘Gascoyne, you and I will have our innings.’

Paul was shocked at the heartless levity of the phrase, and, indeed, the whole point of view was one entirely foreign to him. ‘I don’t feel like that myself,’ he said, drawing back, a little disgusted. ‘I hope my father will live for many years yet. And I’m sure Mr. Solomons has always been very good to you.’

Mr. Lionel’s face broke into a genial smile. ‘Come, come,’ he said frankly, ‘none of that humbug, you know. We’re alone, and I ain’t going to peach on you to the worthy governor. Don’t go trying to talk any nonsense to me, for it don’t go down. You *must* want to succeed to your title, naturally.’

Paul hardly even liked to continue the discussion, his companion’s tone was so intensely distasteful to him; but he felt called upon to dissent. ‘You’re mistaken,’ he said curtly. ‘I’m not talking humbug. My father is extremely near and dear to me.



And as to the baronetcy, I hate the very idea of it. Had it rested from the first outset with me to take it or leave it, I don't think I'd ever so much as have even claimed it.'

'Well, you *are* a rum chap!' Mr. Lionel interjected, much amused. 'For my own part, you know, I'd give a thousand pounds down to have such prospects as you have. And it won't be so long before you come into them, either. The old man drove me up to my uncle's the last time I was at Hillborough, and I thought he was looking precious shaky. Old age, as the preacher said, with rapid strides, is creeping upon him. I only wish my own respected uncle was one-half as near popping off the hooks as he is. But that's the worst of my old boy. He's a tough sort, he is: belongs to the kind that goes on living for ever. 'The doctors say there's something the matter with his heart, to be sure, and that he mustn't excite himself. But, bless your soul! the stingy old beggar's too cunning to excite himself. He'll live till he's ninety, I verily believe, just on purpose to stick to his

tin and spite me. And I, who'd make so much better a use of the money than he does—I'll be turned sixty, I expect, before ever I come into it.'

Paul was too disgusted even to answer. His own obligations to Mr. Solomons, if any, were far less in every way than Mr. Lionel's; but he couldn't have endured so to speak or think of any man to whom he owed the very slightest gratitude.

They went on into the Park with more or less of conversation, and strolled up and down the Row for some time, Mr. Lionel, with a flower gaily stuck in button-hole and a cane poised gracefully in his lemon-gloved hand, staring hard into the face of every girl he passed, and Paul half regretting in his own soul he had consented to come out before the eyes of the town in such uncongenial company. At last, as they neared the thronged corner by Hyde Park Gate, Paul was roused from a reverie into which he had momentarily fallen by hearing a familiar voice at his side fall musically on his ear, exclaiming, with an almost imperceptible foreign accent, 'What! you here,

Mr. Gascoyne? How charming! How delightful!

The heir to the baronetcy turned quickly round, and beheld on a chair in the well-dressed crowd the perennial charms of little Madame Ceriolo.

She looked younger and prettier even than she had looked at Mentone. Madame Ceriolo made a point, in fact, of looking always her youngest and prettiest in London—for hers was the beauty which is well under the control of its skilful possessor. To be pretty in London may pay any day. A great city encloses such endless possibilities. And, indeed, there, among the crowd of unknown faces, where he felt acutely all the friendless loneliness of the stranger in a vast metropolis, Paul was really quite pleased to see the features of the good-humoured little adventuress. He shook hands with her warmly in the innocence of his heart, and stopped a moment to exchange reminiscences. Madame Ceriolo's face lighted up at once (through the pearl powder) with genuine pleasure. This was business indeed. She saw she had made a

momentary conquest of Paul, and she tried her best to follow it up, in order, if possible, to ensure its permanence. For a British baronet, mark you, is never to be despised, above all by those who have special need of a guarantee passport to polite society.

‘So I have to congratulate you,’ she said archly, beaming on him through her glasses, ‘upon securing the little American heiress. Ah, you thought I didn’t know ; but a little bird told me. And, to tell you the truth, I felt sure of it myself the moment I saw you with her on the hills at Mentone.’

Paul, glancing round with burning cheeks, would have given anything that minute to sink into the ground. There, before the face of assembled London ! and the people on all the neighbouring chairs just craning their necks to catch the smallest fragments of their conversation.

‘I—I don’t quite understand,’ he stammered out nervously.

‘Oh yes,’ Madame Ceriolo went on, as cool as a cucumber and still smiling benignly. ‘She’d made up her mind to be Lady Gascoyne, I know, or to perish in the

attempt; and now, we hear, she's really succeeded.'

As she spoke, Madame Ceriolo cast furtive eyes to right and left to see whether all her neighbours duly observed the fact that she was talking to a prospective man of title. At that open acknowledgment of Paul's supposed exalted place in the world, the necks of the audience craned still more violently. A young man of rank, then, in the open marriage market, believed to have secured a wealthy American lady!

'You're mistaken,' Paul answered, speaking rather low and trembling with mortification. 'I am *not* engaged to Miss Boyton at all.' Then he hesitated for a second, and after a brief pause, in spite of Mr. Lionel's presence (as witness for Mr. Solomons to so barefaced a dereliction of duty) he added the further incriminating clause, 'And I don't mean to be.'

The interest of the bystanders reached its highest pitch. It was as good as a paragraph in a society paper. The young man of title disclaimed the hand of the American heiress!

‘But Mr. Armitage told me so,’ Madame Ceriolo retorted, with womanly persistence.

‘Mr. Armitage is hardly likely to be as well informed on the point as I am myself,’ Paul answered, flushing red.

‘Why, it was Miss Boyton herself who assured him of the fact,’ Madame Ceriolo went on, triumphant. ‘And I suppose Miss Boyton ought at least to know about her own engagement.’

‘You’re mistaken,’ Paul answered, lifting his hat curtly and moving off at once to cut short the painful colloquy. And the bystanders, whispering low behind their hands and fans to one another, opined there would soon be a sensation for society in the shape of another aristocratic breach-of-promise case.

As they mingled in the crowd once more, Mr. Lionel, turning to his companion, exclaimed with very marked approbation, ‘That’s a devilish fine woman, anyhow, Gascoyne. Who the dickens is she?’

Paul explained in a few words what little he knew about Madame Ceriolo’s position and antecedents.

‘I like that woman,’ Mr. Lionel went on,

with the air of a connoisseur in female beauty. 'She's got fine eyes, by Jove! and I'm death on eyes. And then her complexion! Why didn't you introduce me? I should like to cultivate her.'

'I'll introduce you if we pass her again,' Paul answered, preoccupied. He was wondering in his own mind what Mr. Lionel would think of this awful resolution of his about the American heiress.

For the moment, however, Mr. Lionel, intent on his own thoughts, was wholly absorbed in his private admiration of Madame Ceriolo's well-developed charms. 'As fine-looking a young woman as I've seen for a fortnight,' he went on meditatively. 'And did you notice, too, how very hard she looked at me?'

'No, I didn't,' Paul answered, just stifling a faint smile of contempt; 'but, to tell you the truth, I think she'd look hard at anybody upon earth who looked hard at her. And she's scarcely young. She's not far off forty, if anything, I fancy.' (At twenty-two, as we all know, forty seems quite mediæval.)

'Let's go back and pass her again,' Lionel

exclaimed with effusion, turning round once more.

Paul shrank from the ordeal of facing those craning bystanders a second time ; but he hadn't the courage to say *No* to his impetuous companion. Mr. Lionel's enthusiasm was too torrential to withstand. So they threaded their way back among the crowd of loungers.

Fortunately, by this time Madame Ceriolo had risen from her seat, after taking her full pennyworth, and was walking briskly and youthfully towards them. She met them once more—not quite undesignedly, either—with a sweet smile of welcome on those cherry red lips of hers. (You buy the stuff for ten sous a stick at any coiffeur's in the Palais Royal.)

'My friend was anxious to make your acquaintance,' Paul said, introducing him. 'Mr. Lionel Solomons—Madame Ceriolo.'

'Not a son of Sir Saul Solomons?' Madame Ceriolo exclaimed, inventing the existence of that eponymous hero on the spot with ready cleverness to flatter her new acquaintance's obvious snobbery.



‘No, not a son,’ Mr. Lionel answered airily, rising to the fly at once; ‘but we belong, I believe, to the same family.’ Which, if Sir Saul Solomons had possessed any objective reality at all, would, no doubt, in a certain broad sense, have been about as true as most other such claims to distinguished relationship.

Madame Ceriolo measured her man accurately on the spot. ‘Ah, that dear Sir Saul,’ she said, with a gentle sigh. ‘He was so good, so clever; I was always so fond of him! And you’re like him, too! The same profile! The same features! The same dark eyes and large full-browed forehead!’ This was doubtless, also, in an ethnical sense, strictly correct; for Mr. Lionel’s personal characteristics were simply those of the ancient and respected race to whom he owed his existence, and of which, apparently, the hypothetical Sir Saul was likewise a bright and shining example.

‘May we walk your way?’ Mr. Lionel said, gallantly ogling his fair companion.

Madame Ceriolo was always professionally

amiable. She accorded that permission with her most marked amiability.

They walked and talked for half an hour in the Park. Then Paul got tired of his subordinate part, and strolled off by himself obligingly. Mr. Lionel waited, and had ten minutes alone with his new-found charmer.

‘Then I may really come and call upon you?’ he asked at last in a melting tone, as he grasped her hand—somewhat hard—at parting.

Madame Ceriolo’s eyes darted a glance into his that might have intoxicated a far stronger man than Lionel Solomons. ‘There’s my card,’ she said, with a gracious smile, producing the famous pasteboard with the countess’s coronet stamped on it in relief. ‘A humble hotel—but I like it myself, because it reminds me of my beloved Tyrol. Whenever you like, Mr. Solomons, you may drop in to see me. Any relation of that admirable Sir Saul, I need hardly say, is always welcome.’

Mr. Lionel went home to his rooms in

Pimlico that afternoon half an inch taller—which would make him fully five feet six in his high-heeled walking shoes on a modest computation.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE WILES OF THE STRANGE WOMAN.

‘ZÉBIE,’ Madame Ceriolo cried in a shrill voice to the maid-in-waiting, ‘je ne reçois pas aujourd’hui, entends-tu, imbécile?’

Mademoiselle Eusébie, more shortly known to her intimates as Zébie, was the *filie de chambre* and general upstairs factotum of the Hôtel de l’Univers, in Clandon Street, Soho. Madame Ceriolo preferred that modest hostelry to the more usual plan of West-End lodgings; partly, to be sure, because it helped to keep up the fiction of her noble birth and Tyrolese ancestry, but partly also because it lent itself more readily to practical Bohemianism than do the strait-laced apartments of Notting Hill or Bayswater. In Clandon Street, Soho, one can

live as one chooses, no man hindering ; and Madame Ceriolo chose to live *à la Zingari*. ‘On y est si bien,’ she said with a delicate shrug of those shapely shoulders to her respectable acquaintances when she was doing propriety ; ‘and, besides, the landlord, you know, is one of my poor compatriots. I take such an interest in his wife and children, in this foggy London, so far from the fresh breeze of our beloved mountains.’ For Madame Ceriolo was strong on the point of sensibility, and sighed (in public) for her native pine-clad valleys.

‘And if Mr. Armitage calls ?’ Zébie asked inquiringly. ‘I am not to deny Madame, I suppose, at least to Mr. Armitage ?’

‘Zébie,’ Madame Ceriolo exclaimed, looking up at her sharply, ‘tu es d’une inconvenance—mais d’une inconvenance !’ Madame paused and reflected. ‘Well, no,’ she went on, after a brief mental calculation, ‘I’m not at home, even to Mr. Armitage.’

‘Tiens,’ Zébie answered ; ‘c’est drôle. Et cependant——’

‘Wait,’ Madame Ceriolo continued, reflecting profoundly. ‘There is yet one thing.

If an ugly little Jew calls'—and Madame swept her finger rapidly through the air in burlesque representation of Mr. Lionel's well-marked profile—'nose so, lips so, curly hair, bulging forehead, odour of hair-oil—gives his name, I fancy, as Mr. Lionel Solomons——'

'Well, Madame?' Zébie repeated dutifully, with her hand on the door-edge.

'If he calls,' Madame went on, gathering her robe around her, 'you may tell him I'm indisposed—a slight indisposition—and will see nobody. But say to him, after awhile, with ever so little hesitation, you'll take up his card and inquire if I can receive him. And, then, you may show him meanwhile into the salon. That'll give me time, of course, to change my *peignoir*.'

It was four o'clock gone, in the afternoon, a few days later than their meeting in the Park; and Madame, who had been up late at a little supper the evening before, was still in the intimacy of dressing-gown and curl-papers.

'Parfaitement, Madame,' Zébie responded cheerfully, in the tone of one well accustomed

to receiving such delicate orders, and left the room ; while Madame lounged back on the sofa of her little sitting-room, and glanced lazily over the *feuilleton* of the previous day's *Figaro*.

The hotel was of the usual London-French type — a dingy, uncomfortable, dead-alive little place—mean and dear, yet Madame liked it. She could receive her callers and smoke her cigarettes here without attracting attention. She was rolling a bit of rice-paper, in fact, with practised skill between those dainty plump fingers ten minutes later, when Zébie reappeared at the door once more, with a card in her hand and a smile on her saucy Parisian features. 'The Monsieur Madame expected,' she said : 'he attends you in the salon.'

Madame jumped up, and roused herself at once. 'My blue gown, Zébie,' she cried. 'No, not that, stupid ! Yes, that's the one, with the pleats in front. Now, just give me time to slip myself into it, and to comb out my fringe, and touch up my cheeks a bit, and then you may bring the *gamin* up to me. Poor little imbecile ! Tell him I'm in bed

and meant to receive nobody—but hearing it was him, in spite of my *migraine*, I decided to make an effort and raise myself.’

‘Parfaitement, Madame,’ Zébie echoed once more, with ready acquiescence, and disappeared down the stairs to deliver her message.

‘So it’s you, Mr. Solomons,’ Madame cried, looking up from the sofa, where she lay in her shawls and her becoming tea-gown, with a hasty lace-wrap flung coquet-tishly round her pearl-white neck, as Mr. Lionel entered. ‘How very good of you to come and look me up so soon! Now admit, Monsieur, that I’m not ungrateful. I was ill in bed when my maid brought me up your card just now, and for nobody else in the world would I have thought of stirring myself. But when I heard it was *you*’—she gave him a killing glance from beneath those pencilled lashes—‘I said to Eusébie, “Just hand me the very first dress you come across in my wardrobe, and tell the gentleman I’ll see him directly.” And so up I got, and here I am; and now I’m sure you’ll excuse my lighting a wee little cigarette, just a cigarette



of my own rolling, because I've made my poor fluttering heart beat so with the exertion.'

Mr. Lionel would have excused a hundred cigarettes, so enchanted was he with this gracious reception. In fact, he admitted to a weakness for the fragrant Latakia himself, and in two minutes more he was actually inhaling the breath of one, deftly manufactured for his special use by Madame Ceriolo's own cunning fingers.

Madame Ceriolo twisted him as she twisted the cigarettes. He sat there, intoxicated with her charms, for more than an hour, in the course of which time the little woman, by dexterous side-pressure, had pumped him of all he knew or thought far more effectually than even Armitage himself could have done it. She handled him gingerly with infinite skill. 'No, you're not in *the City*!' she exclaimed once, with well-assumed surprise, when Mr. Lionel happened incidentally to allude to the nature of his own accustomed pursuits. 'You're trying to take me in. You don't mean to tell me you're really in *the City*!'

‘Why not?’ Mr. Lionel asked, with a flush of pride.

‘Oh, you’re not in the very least like a *City* man,’ Madame Ceriolo replied, looking up at him archly. ‘Why, I thought from your manners you were one of the people who pass their lives dawdling between their club and the Row. I never should have believed you could possibly be in the City. What *is* your club, by the way?’ she added with an afterthought, ‘in case I should ever want to write to you.’

Mr. Lionel’s lips trembled with pleasure. ‘I’m down for the Garrick,’ he said (which was, in point of fact, an inexact remark); ‘but until I get in there, you know—it’s such a long job nowadays—I hang out for the present at the Junior Financial. It’s a small place in Duke Street, St. James’s. If ever you should do me the honour to write to me, though, I think you’d better write to my chambers in Pimlico.’ He called them ‘chambers’ instead of lodgings, because it sounded more swell and rakish. And he produced a card with his name and address on it.

Madame Ceriolo placed it with marked care in an inner compartment of her pretty little tortoiseshell purse—the purse with the coronet and initials on the case, which had been given her in Paris by—well, never mind those forgotten little episodes. ‘And so you live with Mr. Gascoyne!’ she said, noting the address. ‘Dear Mr. Gascoyne! so quaint, so original! Though we all laughed at him, we all liked him. He was the life and soul of our party at Mentone.’

‘Well, I live with him only because I find it convenient,’ Mr. Lionel interposed. ‘He’s not exactly the sort of chap I should take to naturally.’

Madame Ceriolo caught at her cue at once. ‘I should think not,’ she echoed. ‘A deal too slow for *you*, one can see that at a glance. A very good fellow in his way, of course; but, oh my! so strait-laced, so absurdly puritanical.’ And she laughed melodiously.

‘And how about the American heiress you spoke of in the Park?’ Mr. Lionel inquired with professional eagerness.

‘Oh, that was all chaff,’ Madame Ceriolo

answered, after an imperceptible pause, to gain time for her invention. She was a good-natured little swindler, after all, was Madame Ceriolo ; and from the way he asked it, she jumped to the conclusion he wanted the information for no friendly purpose, so she withheld it sternly. Why should she want to do a bad turn to the poor little scallywag ?

So the conversation glided off upon Paul, his Quixotic ideas and his moral absurdities ; and before it had ended, the simple-minded young cynic, like clay in the hands of the easy-going but cunning adventuress, had told her all about Mr. Solomons and himself, and the plan for exploiting the British baronet, and the confounded time an uncle always contrived to live, and the difficulty of extracting blood from a stone, and the trials and troubles of the genus nephew in its endeavour to perform that arduous surgical operation. To all of which Madame Ceriolo, feeling her way with caution by tentative steps, had extended a ready and sympathetic ear, and had made a rapid mental note, ‘ Bad heart, weak head, good material to work

upon—fool, vain, impressionable, unscrupulous.’ Such men as that were Madame’s stock-in-trade. She batted on their money, sucked them dry as fast as she could, and then left them.

Not that Madame was ever what British respectability in its exactest sense describes as disreputable. The wise adventuress knew a more excellent way than that. Never throw away the essentials of a good name. She traded entirely upon promises and expectations. Her method was to make a man head over ears in love, and then to delude him into the fallacious belief that she meant to marry him. As soon as he was reduced to the flaccid condition, by constant draining, she retired gracefully. Some day, when she found a man rich enough and endurable enough, she intended to carry the programme of marriage into execution and end her days in the odour of respectability. But that was for the remote future, no doubt. Meanwhile, she was content to take what she could get by her drainage operations, and live her own Bohemian life untrammelled.

At last, most unwillingly, Mr. Lionel rose and took up his hat to go.

‘I may come again soon?’ he said interrogatively.

Madame’s professional amiability never forsook her in similar circumstances. ‘As often as you like,’ she answered, smiling a benign smile upon the captured victim; ‘I’m always glad to see nice people—except on Fridays,’ she added after a pause. Friday was the day when Armitage most often called, and she didn’t wish to let her two principal visitors clash unnecessarily.

At the door Mr. Lionel pressed her hand with a tender squeeze. Madame Ceriolo returned the pressure with a demure and well-calculated diminution of intensity. It doesn’t do to let them think they can make the running too fast or too easily. Draw them on by degrees and they stick the longer.

Mr. Lionel gazed into those languid eyes of hers. Madame Ceriolo dropped the lids with most maidenly modesty. ‘Don’t mention to Mr. Gascoyne,’ she murmured, withdrawing her hand, which Lionel showed a

tendency to hold too long, 'that you've been here this afternoon, I beg of you as a favour.'

'How curious!' her new admirer exclaimed with surprise. 'Why, *I* was just going to ask *you* not to say anything to him for worlds about it.'

'Sympathy,' Madame Ceriolo murmured. 'The common brain-wave. When people are cast in corresponding moulds, these curious things often happen pat, just so. *Figurez-vous si je suis sympathique.*' And she took his hand once more, and let it drop suddenly; then she turned and fled like a girl, to the sofa, as if half ashamed of her own unwise emotion.

Mr. Lionel went down the stairs in the seventh heaven. At last he had found a beautiful woman ready to admire him. She saw his good points and appreciated him at once at his full worth. Forty? What malevolent, ill-natured nonsense! Not a day more than twenty-seven, he'd be bound on affidavit. And, then, what mattered the disparity of age? Such grace, such knowledge of the world and society, such noble

birth, such a countess's coronet embroidered on her handkerchief!

‘Zébie,’ Madame cried from her sofa in the corner, as that well-trained domestic answered her double ring (*‘sonnez deux fois pour la fille de chambre’*), while Lionel’s footfall still echoed on the stair, ‘if that little fool of a Jew calls again you can show him up straight off at any time. Do you understand, idiot? at any time—unless Mr. Armitage is here already.’



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE BARONETCY IN THE BALANCE.

SUMMER and autumn Paul worked away, very much uphill, at journalism in London, pushing his road ahead slowly but surely into steady occupation, and not only covering all his modest expenses, but even laying by a trifle at odd times towards wiping out those terrible claims of Mr. Solomons'.

It was hard work and uphill work, undeniably. No matter how good a start a man may get in literature—and, thanks to indefatigable Mrs. Douglas, with her backstairs instinct, Paul's start had been an unusually easy one—the profession of letters must needs be an arduous craft for every beginner. The doors are crowded; the apprenticeship is long, toilsome and ill-paid.

Paul had to endure that painful fate, common to all of us who earn our bread by spinning material out of our own brains for public consumption, of seeing manuscript after manuscript 'declined with thanks,' and of labouring for hours and hours together on that which, after all, profited nothing. Nevertheless, a certain proportion of his work was accepted and paid for; and that proportion brought him enough to pay for his half of the rooms he shared with his uncongenial fellow-lodger, and to keep him in food, clothing, and washing. It was a great joy to him when he began to find his weekly receipts outbalance expenditure, and to lay by, were it only a few shillings at a time, towards the final extinguishment of his debt to Mr. Solomons.

Had it been the National Debt of England that he had to wipe out, it could not have seemed to him at the time much more hopeless of accomplishment. But still he toiled on, determined at least to do his best by it—with Nea in the background watching over him from a distance.

Summer and autumn passed away, and

at Christmas, when Faith was freed once more from the tyranny of the Infants, and business was slack in London offices, he determined to run down for a week or two's rest and change to Hillborough. But he must pay for his board and lodging, he told his mother : he was a free man now, earning his own livelihood, and he must no longer be a burden to his family in any way. With many remonstrances, he was at last allowed to have his wish, and to contribute the modest sum of fifteen shillings a week, in return for his keep, to the domestic exchequer.

He had only been home one day, when Faith took him for their favourite walk on the Knoll, and confided to him all her most recent family observations.

‘Do you notice any difference in father, Paul?’ she asked a little anxiously, as they walked along the springy turf of that long ridge, looking down upon the wide weald, on a beautiful bright December morning.

Paul hesitated to answer. ‘Well, Lionel Solomons said to me in the summer,’ he replied at last, after a long pause, ‘that he

was getting shaky, and that made me nervous; so I've been watching him close yesterday and to-day, and, to tell you the truth, I'm afraid, Faith, he isn't quite as strong on his legs as he used to be.'

Faith's eyes filled with tears. To her and to Paul, it was nothing that their father's *h's* were weak or non-existent, and that their father's grammar was deficient in concords. They loved him as dearly as if he had been a lily-handed baronet of many broad acres, with courtly manners and an elegant drawl, but possessing no final *g's* to his name, and hardly a trace of the letter *r* to speak of. To say the truth, they loved him even much better. They realized how hard he had worked all his days to keep them, and how, according to his light, feeble and flickering enough, he had tried to do the very best in life for them. He had always been a kind and indulgent father; and the bare thought of losing him was to Faith and to Paul a terrible source of coming trouble.

'His life's so hard,' Faith murmured through her rising tears. 'At his age, he oughtn't to have to be driving about all day

or all night in the rain and the cold. He isn't strong enough for it now—I'm sure he isn't, Paul—and it makes my heart bleed to see how he has to go and do it.'

'The fact is,' Paul answered, 'a man in his position ought to have a son who can fill his place, and take the heaviest work at least off his shoulders. If dear father'd done what he ought to have done with me, I really believe he'd have brought me up to his own trade, and to carry on the business now he isn't fit for it.'

Faith's womanly soul revolted at the alternative. She was proud of Paul, her clever, well-educated Oxford brother, and she couldn't bear to think of him, even in fancy, degraded to the level of a mere common horsey hanger-on of stables. 'Oh, don't say that, Paul darling!' she cried, half aghast. 'I wish dear father had somebody to help him and take his place, now he's old, of course; but not *you*, Paul—not *you*—oh, never, never! Don't talk of it, even. It seems such a perfect desecration.'

'I'd come back now and help him,' Paul answered stubbornly. 'I'd come back and

help him, even as it is, only I know the shock of it would break his heart. He could never put up with the disappointment. I can manage a horse as well as anybody even now, and I wouldn't mind the work one bit—I hope I'm strong-minded enough not to be ashamed of my father's trade—but I'm sure he himself would never consent to it. He's brought me up to be a gentleman as well as he could, and he's fixed his heart on my being a credit to the title, whenever the miserable thing falls in to me ; and if I were to turn back on it now and come home to help him, he'd feel it was a come-down from all his high hopes and ideals for my future, and he'd be a disappointed man henceforth and for ever.'

'Oh yes ; and to think of the disgrace before all the county !' Faith added with a sigh. A woman must always see things mainly from the social point of view. 'I should hate all the nasty rich people—the Hamiltons and the Boyd-Galloways and all that horrid lot—to go sniggering and chuckling over it among themselves, as I know they would, and to say, "So that fellow

Gascoyne, after sending his son to Oxford and trying to make a gentleman of him, has had to come down from his high horse at last, and bring him back to Hillborough in the end to look after the stables !” The wretched sneering things ! I know the nasty ways of them !

‘ Father could never stand that,’ Paul answered reflectively.

‘ No, never,’ Faith replied. ‘ Paul, don’t you ever even speak of it to him.’

But for the three weeks of his stay at Hillborough Paul watched his father with close attention. The baronet cabman wasn’t well, that was clear. He complained constantly of a dull pain in his side, and manifested an unwonted dislike to going out at nights whenever the sky was cold or frosty. ‘ The wind seemed to ketch him,’ he said, ‘ as it’d never ketched him in all his life afore, out Kent’s Hill way specially, where it blew ’most hard enough to take a man off the box these bitter evenings. He didn’t want no jobs out there by Kent’s Hill this weather if he could help it.’

New Year’s week, however, was a busy

week ; there were parties and dances at many country houses, and Sir Emery's slate, hung up behind the door, was thick with orders. Paul was busy, too, with work for editors, which kept him close at his desk, writing for dear life the best part of the day, for journalism knows no such word as holiday. As much as Sir Emery would let him, however, Paul went out to the yard at odd moments to harness in the horses and do small ends of work whenever the hired man was off on a job ; but that wasn't often, for Sir Emery fretted and fumed to see Paul so occupied, and Faith declared the worry it engendered in father's mind was almost worse for him, she believed, than the cold and exposure. Pulled two ways, in fact, by her double devotion, she conspired with Paul to help her father, and then conspired with her father in turn to keep Paul, their own precious Paul, outside the stables at all hazards.

The fourth of January was a bitter cold day. So cold a day had not been known for years at Hillborough. In the morning Mr. Solomons met Sir Emery by chance at the



station. 'Why, bless my soul, Gascoyne,' he cried with a start, 'how ill you look, to be sure !' Then he made a mental note to himself that the premium on the noble baronet's life policy should have been paid yesterday, and that by all appearances settlement ought not to be delayed longer than to-morrow. You never know what a day may bring forth ; and, indeed, if Mr. Solomons hadn't had an execution to put in that very morning at Shillingford, he would have rushed off there and then, with money in hand, to make sure of his insurance at the London office.

Instead of which he merely remarked in a casual tone as he jumped into his train, 'My thermometer registered nine degrees of frost last night. Take care, Gascoyne, how you expose yourself this weather.'

At ten o'clock that evening, as they sat round the fire, chatting family gossip in a group together, Sir Emery suddenly rose and looked at the clock. 'I must be going now,' he said in a shuffling way. ''Arf-past ten was the hour Miss Boyd-Galloway told me.'

Faith glanced up at him sharply with a pained look.

‘Why, you’re not going out again to-night, father?’ she exclaimed in surprise. ‘There’s nothing on the slate; I looked myself to see about it.’

‘Well, this ’ere was a verbal horder,’ Sir Emery answered, putting on his coat with evident difficulty and some marks of pain in his right side. ‘Miss Boyd-Galloway, she met me down in the ’Igh Street this morning, and she told me I was to go out to Kent’s ’Ill to fetch her. Dinner, I expect, or else a small an’ early. But I reckon it’s dinner; it’s ’most too soon to go to take up even for a children’s or a Cindereller.’

Paul glanced at Faith, and Faith glanced at Paul. Sir Emery had evidently omitted to note it on the slate on purpose. A rapid signalling went on between their eyes. ‘Dare I venture?’ Paul’s asked in mute pantomime of Faith’s, and Faith’s, with a droop of extreme reluctance, made answer dumbly: ‘I suppose you must. He’s too ill to go; but oh, Paul, Paul, the disgrace and humiliation of it!’

The young man made up his mind at once and irrevocably. ‘Father,’ he said, rising

and fronting him as he stood, still struggling with his coat, 'sit down where you are. I can't allow you to go up Kent's Hill to-night. You're not feeling well. I can see you're suffering. You're unfit for work. You must let me go to take up Miss Boyd-Galloway instead of you.'

Sir Emery burst into a sudden laugh of genuine amusement. His Paul to go cab-driving! It was too ridiculous. Then the laugh seemed to catch him violently in the side, and he subsided once more with a pained expression of face. 'Paul, my boy,' he answered, sinking back into his chair to hide the twinge, 'I wouldn't let you go—no, not for five 'undred pounds down. You, as is a gentleman born and bred, and out there, afore the eyes of all 'Illborough and Surrey!'

Faith looked at her mother with an imperious look. 'Father,' she cried, seizing his arm convulsively in her grasp, 'you know I hate it as much as you do. You know I can't bear for Paul to do it. But it must be done. It's a hard wrench, but you *must* let him go. I can see you're ill. Dear father,

you ought to have told us before, and then perhaps we might have managed to get some other driver.'

'There ain't no other driver nor other 'oss disengaged in all 'Illborough to-night,' her father answered confidently, shaking his head as he looked at her.

Once more Faith telegraphed with her eyes to Paul, and Paul telegraphed back to Faith. 'Father,' he said, laying his hand on the old man's shoulder persuasively, 'you *must* let me go. There's no other way out of it. I'll wrap myself up tight, and muffle my throat, if you like, so that nobody 'll notice me; and in the dark, at the door, they're not likely to look close. But go I *must*; of that I'm determined.'

The father humoured him for a moment. 'Well, you can go, any way, and put in the 'osses,' he answered reluctantly, for he hated his son to do anything at all about the stables and coach-house.

Paul went out and put them in at once with the confidence of old habituation. Then he left them standing alone in the yard while he ran upstairs to get his ulster and com-

forter. 'Wait a minute,' he said, 'I'll soon be down.' Faith went up with him to see that all was snug and warm. 'Mind you wrap up well, Paul,' she cried, with her eyes dimmed sadly for the family disgrace. 'It's a bitter cold night. If father was to go to Kent's Hill this evening, I'm sure it'd very nearly be the death of him.'

In two minutes more they descended the stairs. At the door Faith stopped and kissed him convulsively. It was a hard wrench, but she knew they must do it. Then they went together into the little parlour. There their mother sat, looking very uncomfortable in her easy-chair. The larger one opposite, where Sir Emery usually took his ease by night, was now vacant. Faith glanced at Paul in mute inquiry. 'Where is he, mother?' Paul gasped out anxiously.

'E's gone, Paul,' Mrs. Gascoyne answered with a sudden gulp. 'The minute you was out o' the room, 'e whipped up his things, jumped up from 'is chair, and says to me in a hurry, "Mother, I'm off," says 'e, an' out he run in 'is overcoat as he stood, scrambled

up on to the box, gave the 'osses the word, an' afore I could as much as say "Emery, don't," drove off up the road as 'ard as ever 'is 'ands could drive 'em.'

Faith sank into the chair with a despairing look. 'It'll kill him,' she cried, sobbing. 'Oh, Paul, it'll kill him !'

Paul did not wait or hesitate for a second. 'Where's he gone?' he cried. 'To which house on the hill? I'll run after him, catch him up, and drive him back home, if only you know which house he's going to.'

'He never told us,' Faith gasped out, as white as death. 'He only said he was going to Kent's Hill to fetch Miss Boyd-Galloway. There are so many big houses on the hill, and so many roads, and so many dinners just now. But perhaps the likeliest is Colonel Hamilton's, isn't it?'

Without another word Paul opened the door and darted up the street. 'I'll catch him yet,' he cried, as he dashed round the corner of Plowden's Court. 'Oh, mother, mother, you ought to have stopped him !'

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### IN HOT PURSUIT.

TAKING it for granted his father had driven, as Faith suggested, to Colonel Hamilton's, Paul ran at full speed along the frosty high-road in the direction of that end of the Kent's Hill hog's back. For the hill rears itself up as a great mass of narrow sandstone upland, extending for some three miles in a long straight line down the centre of the valley, and exposed to all the four winds of heaven impartially. Snow was beginning to fall now, and the road under-foot rang hard as iron. Paul ran on without stopping till he was out of breath. Then he halted awhile by the foot of the first slope, and climbed slowly on towards the lower platform.

Half-way up he met a returning cab, full,

of course, and therefore unwilling to wait and be questioned. But it was no time to stand on ceremony now. Paul knew his father's life was absolutely at stake. He called to it to halt. The driver recognised his voice and pulled up to a walk. 'Have you passed my father anywhere, going up the hill?' Paul inquired eagerly.

'Ow do I know?' the man answered in a very gruff tone, ill-pleased at the interruption. 'I've passed a dozen or more of kebs and kerridges goin' to fetch parties 'ere and there on the 'ill; but it's as dark as pitch, so 'oo's to know by magic 'oo druv them?' And whistling to himself a dissatisfied whistle, he whipped up again and drove on, leaving Paul no wiser.

It's a very long way from Hillborough to Kent's Hill, five miles at least by the shortest road; and long before Paul had reached the top his heart began to sink within him as he saw how impossible it was for him to overtake his father. Nevertheless, he persisted, out of pure stubborn doggedness and perseverance; he would go at least to the house and let him know he was there. And, if



possible, he would persuade him to remain under shelter at some neighbouring cottage till the next morning.

But, oh ! the long weary way up those frozen hills, all in the dark, with the snow falling fast in the road, and the bitter cold wind beating hard all the time against his face as he fronted it ! It was cold for Paul even as he walked and faced it—cold in spite of the exertion of mounting. How infinitely colder, then, it must be for his father, sitting still on the box, with that dull pain growing deeper every minute in his side, and the chill wind whistling round the corners of the carriage !

On, and on, and on, through the soft snow he trudged, with his heart sinking lower at every step, and his feet and hands growing colder and colder. Of all the hills in England Kent's Hill is the very most interminable. Time after time you think you are at the top, and time after time, just as you reach the apparent summit, you see yet another slope opening out with delusive finality in front of you. But at last Paul reached the end of those five long miles and those nine hundred

feet of sheer ascent, and turned with wearied and aching limbs under the gateway of Colonel Hamilton's garden. At the door he saw at once he had come in vain. There was certainly no party at the Colonel's to-night. Not a carriage at the door ; not a sign of life. It was close on eleven now, but, emboldened by necessity, he rang the bell. After some minutes his ring was answered by a supercilious footman in incomplete costume. 'I'm sorry to trouble you,' Paul gasped, 'but can you tell me, please, whereabouts on the Hill there's a party to-night?'

The supercilious footman eyed him askance with profound astonishment. 'Young man,' he said severely, 'do you mean to say you've rung me up this time of night from my own bedroom, for nothink else but just to ask me where there's a party on the 'ill? There's parties on the 'ill everywhere this evening.' And without waiting for Paul to explain himself further, he slammed the door to in his face with uncompromising rudeness.

Paul turned from the porch, too much distressed on his father's account even to notice

the personal insult, and made his way through the snow, along uncertain paths, to the very top of the ridge, where he could see on either hand over the whole surrounding country, and just at what house the lights burned brightest. Lady Mary Webster's seemed most thronged of any, and Miss Boyd-Galloway was intimate with Lady Mary. So thither Paul plodded along by the top of the ridge, descending through the grounds, reckless of fences or proprietary rights, till he stood in front of the crowded carriage-drive. Coachmen were there, half a dozen or more, walking up and down in the snow and beating their chests with their arms to keep themselves warm, while their weary horses stood patiently by, the snow melting as it fell on their flanks and faces.

It was no night for any man to keep another waiting on.

'Ere's Gascoyne's son !' one of the cabmen cried as he came up, for they were mostly cabmen, nobody caring to risk their own horses' lives abroad in such slippery weather ; since rich men, indeed, take more heed of horseflesh than of their even Christians.

‘Why, what do you want, Mr. Paul?’ another of them asked, half touching his hat in a kind of undecided salute to the half-made gentleman; for they all knew that Gascoyne’s son had been to Oxford College, and would develop in time into a real recognised baronet, with his name in the peerage.

‘Is my father here, or has he been here?’ Paul cried out breathless. ‘He went out to-night when he wasn’t fit to go, and I’ve come up to see if he’s got here safe, or if I could do anything in any way to help him.’

The first speaker shook his head with a very decided negative. ‘No, ’e ain’t been ’ere,’ he answered. ‘’E ’aven’t no job. Leastways, none of us ain’t a-seen ’im anywhere.’

A terrible idea flashed across Paul’s mind. Could his father have started and failed on the way? Too agitated to care what might happen to himself again, he rang the bell, and asked the servant boldly, ‘Is Miss Boyd-Galloway here? or has she been here this evening?’

‘No, sir,’ the servant answered; he was a stranger in the land, and judged Paul rightly

by his appearance and accent. 'Miss Boyd-Galloway's not been here at all. I don't think, in fact, my lady expected her.'

'Will you go in and ask if anybody knows where Miss Boyd-Galloway's spending the evening?' Paul cried in his agony. 'Tell them it's a matter of life and death. I want to know where to find Miss Boyd-Galloway.'

In a few minutes more the servant returned, bringing along with him young Mr. Webster, the son of the house, in person. 'Oh, it's you, is it, Gascoyne?' the young man said, eyeing him somewhat astonished. 'Why, what on earth do you want with Miss Boyd-Galloway this evening?'

'My father's gone to fetch her,' Paul gasped out in despair; 'he's very ill to-night, and oughtn't to have ventured out, and I've come to see whether I can overtake him.'

Young Mr. Webster was kind-hearted in his way. 'I'm sorry for that,' he said good-naturedly; 'but I'm glad it's nothing the matter with Miss Boyd-Galloway herself, anyhow. Lady Mary was in quite a state of mind just now when she got your message.'

I must run in at once and reassure her. But won't you step inside and have a glass of wine before you go off yourself? You don't look well, and it's a freezing cold night. Here, Roberts, a glass of wine for Mr. Gascoyne in the hall. Now, will you ?

'I won't take any wine, thanks,' Paul answered hurriedly, declining the proffered hospitality on more grounds than one. 'But you haven't told me if you know where Miss Boyd-Galloway's spending the evening. I *must* find out, to go to my father.' He spoke so anxiously that there was no mistaking the serious importance of his errand.

'Oh, I'll go and inquire,' young Webster answered carelessly; and he went back at once with his lounging step to the bright warm drawing-room.

'Who is it?' Lady Mary exclaimed, coming forward eagerly. 'Don't tell me anything dreadful has happened to dear Isabel!'

'Oh, it's nothing at all,' young Webster answered, laughing outright at her fears. 'It's only that young Gascoyne from Hillborough wants to know at once where Isabel's dining.'

‘That young Gascoyne!’ Lady Mary cried, aghast. ‘*Not* the young man they sent up to Oxford, I hope! Why, what on earth can he want, my dear Bertie, with Isabel?’

‘He doesn’t want Isabel,’ the young man answered, with an amused smile. ‘It seems his father’s gone somewhere to fetch her, and he thinks the old man’s too ill to be out, and he’s come up on foot all the way to look after him.’

‘Very proper of him to help his father, of course,’ Lady Mary assented with a stiff acquiescence, perceiving in this act a due appreciation of the duty of the poor to their parents, as set forth in the Church Catechism; ‘but he ought surely to know better than to come and disturb *us* about such a subject. He might have rung and inquired of Roberts.’

‘So he did,’ her son answered, with masculine common-sense. ‘But Roberts couldn’t tell him, so he very naturally asked for *me*; and the simple question now is this—where’s Isabel?’

‘She dining at the Dean’s,’ Lady Mary

replied coldly; 'but don't you go and tell him so yourself for worlds, Bertie. Let Roberts take out the message to the young person.' For Lady Mary was a stickler in her way for the due subordination of the classes of society.

Before the words were well out of her ladyship's mouth, however, her son had made his way into the hall once more, unheeding the prohibition, and conveyed to Paul the information he wanted as to Miss Boyd-Galloway's present whereabouts.

The message left Paul more hopelessly out of his bearings than ever. The fact was, he had come the wrong way. The Dean's was at the exact opposite end of Kent's Hill, three miles from the Websters' as the crow flies, by a trackless route among gorse and heather. There was no chance now left of overtaking his father before he drove from the house. All Paul could possibly do was to follow in his steps and hear what tidings he could of him from those who had seen him.

Away he trudged with trembling feet, along the crest of the ridge, stumbling from



time to time over bushes half hidden by the newly-fallen snow, and with the keen air cutting against his face like a knife as he breasted it. It was indeed an awful night—awful even down in the snug valley at Hillborough, but almost Arctic in the intensity of its bitter cold on those bleak, wind-swept uplands. They say Kent's Hill is the chilliest spot in winter in all Southern England ; as Paul pushed his way across the long bare summit that January evening, he trembled in his heart for the effect upon his father. It was slow work indeed to cover the three miles that lay between him and the Dean's, even disregarding as he was of the frequent notice-boards which threatened the utmost rigour of the law with churlish plainness of speech to inoffensive trespassers. More than once he missed his way in the blinding snow, and found himself face to face with the steeply-scarped southern bank, or with some wall or hedge on the slope to northward. But at last, pushing on in spite of all difficulties, he reached the garden at the Dean's, and stood alone within the snow-covered gateway. There, all was still once

more ; the party had melted away, for it was now nearly midnight. But a light still burned feebly in one of the upper rooms. In his eagerness and anxiety Paul could not brook delay ; he ventured here again to ring the bell. A servant put out his head slowly and inquiringly from the half-opened window.

‘ Was Miss Boyd-Galloway dining here to-night ? ’ Paul asked with a sinking heart of the sleepy servant.

‘ Yes,’ the man answered ; ‘ but she’s gone half an hour ago.’

‘ Who drove her home, or did she drive home at all ? ’ Paul inquired once more.

‘ How should I know ? ’ the servant replied, withdrawing his head testily. ‘ Do you think I take down their numbers as they pass, like the bobby at the station ? She ain’t here, that’s all. Ask me another one.’

And he slammed the casement, leaving Paul alone on the snow-covered gravel-walk.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### AT THE CALL OF DUTY.

MEANWHILE, Sir Emery Gascoyne, Baronet, had been faithfully carrying out the duties of his station. He had promised to go and fetch Miss Boyd-Galloway at the Dean's, and come snow or rain or hail or frost, with perfect fidelity he had gone to fetch her.

His fatherly pride would never have allowed him to let Paul—his gentleman son—take his place on the box even for a single evening. Better by far meet his fate than that. To die was a thousand times easier than disgrace. So, as soon as Paul was out of sight upstairs, he had risen from his seat, seized his whip from the rack, and, in spite of that catching pain deep down in his side,

driven off hastily before Paul could intercept him.

The drive to the Hill—by the west road at the further end, while Paul had followed by the shorter and steeper eastern route—was a bitter cold one : and the horses, though roughed that day, had stumbled many times on the frozen slopes, having stern work indeed to drag the heavy cab up that endless zigzag. As Sir Emery drove, the pain in his side grew duller and deeper : and though he was too unskilled in diagnosis to know it for pleurisy, as it really was, he felt himself it was blowing up hard for a serious illness. But, accustomed as he had long been to exposure in all weathers, he made light of the discomfort, and drove bravely along to the Dean's doorway.

It was half-past ten by Sir Emery's watch—the necessary business silver watch of the country cabman—when he reached the house : but though he sent in word that he was there and ready, his fare was in no great hurry, as it seemed, to present herself.

‘Miss Boyd-Galloway's carriage,’ the foot-

man announced ; but Miss Boyd-Galloway, immersed in her game of whist, only nodded in reply, and went on playing out the end of the rubber in dignified silence. She was a lady who loved the rigour of the game. It was comfortably warm in that snug country-house ; and who thinks of the cabman outside in the cold there ?

The other coachmen walked up and down, and slapped their chests, and exhorted their horses. But Sir Emery sat motionless and chilled on the box, not daring to dismount, lest when once down he should be unable to get up again. The butler, a good-natured soul who had known him for years, offered him a glass of whisky-and-water to keep him warm. But Sir Emery shook his head in dissent : it would only make him colder if he had to sit long on the box in the snow there.

‘ Gascoyne’s off his feed,’ another cabman remarked with a cheerful nod ; and the rest laughed.

But Sir Emery didn’t laugh. He sat stark and stiff, breathing every moment with increasing difficulty, on his seat by the porch, under shelter of the yew-tree.

For half an hour or more he waited in the cold. One after another, the guests dropped out and drove away piecemeal ; but not Miss Boyd-Galloway. He trembled and shivered and grew numb within. Yet wait he must ; there was absolutely no help for it. Colder and colder he grew till he seemed all ice. His father's heart was broken within him. More than once in his miserable faintness he half wished to himself he had allowed Paul, after all, just this one night to relieve him.

At last the door opened for the tenth time, and ' Miss Boyd-Galloway's carriage ' was duly summoned.

There was a moment's pause. Sir Emery was almost too numbed to move. Then slowly, with an effort, he turned his horses, and, wheeling round in a circle, brought them up to the doorway.

' What do you mean by keeping us waiting here in the cold like this ? ' Miss Boyd-Galloway asked in a sharp, rasping voice. She was a sour-looking lady of a certain age, and losing the rubber never improved her temper.

Sir Emery answered nothing. He was

too well accustomed to the ways of the trade even to reflect to himself in his own silent soul that Miss Boyd-Galloway had kept *him* waiting in the cold—and in far worse cold—for considerably more than half an hour.

The footman stood forward and opened the door. Miss Boyd-Galloway and her friend, wrapped in endless rugs over their square-cut dresses, stepped inside and seated themselves. ‘Home!’ Miss Boyd-Galloway called out with an authoritative voice. There was another pause. Miss Boyd-Galloway put out her head to see the reason. ‘Home, I said, Gascoyne,’ she repeated angrily. ‘Didn’t you hear me speak? Why, what are you waiting for?’

Sir Emery raised his whip with an evident effort. ‘I’m a-goin’, miss,’ he answered, and his voice was thick. ‘But it’s a main cold night, and the road’s ’eavy, and the ’osses is tired.’

‘Good gracious, what impertinence!’ Miss Boyd-Galloway observed, withdrawing her head and shivering audibly. ‘It’s my belief, Louisa, that man’s been drinking.’

‘He certainly didn’t seem able to move on

the box,' her companion retorted; 'I noticed his manner.'

'Oh, he's drunk,' Miss Boyd-Galloway answered with prompt decisiveness. 'Dead drunk, I'm certain. Just see how he's driving. He hasn't even got sense enough left to guide his horses, and it runs in the blood, you know; they're a precious bad lot all through, these Gascoynes! To think that a man should have come down to this, whose ancestors were gentlemen born and bred and real Welsh baronets! A common cab-driver, and drunk at that! And the daughter's just as bad—that horrid girl at the National School at Hillborough. A proud, discontented, impertinent hussy! Why, she won't even say "miss" to my face when she speaks to me.'

'Phew, what a jolt!' the other lady exclaimed, seizing Miss Boyd-Galloway's arm as the cab tipped up over a rut in the roadway.

'Drunk! quite drunk!' Miss Boyd-Galloway repeated with a meditative air, now confirmed in her opinion. 'I only hope to goodness he won't upset us in the



snow—it's awfully drifted—anywhere here by the roadside.'

And, indeed, to do the fare full justice, there seemed good reason that particular evening to blame Sir Emery Gascoyne's driving. As a rule, the baronet was a careful and cautious whip, little given to wild or reckless coachmanship, and inclined to be sparing, both by inclination and policy, of his valuable horseflesh. But to-night he seemed to let the horses wander at their own sweet will, from side to side, hardly guiding them at all through the snow and the crossings. At times they swerved dangerously close to the off-hedge; at others they almost neared the edge of the slope that led down the zigzag. 'We shall never get out of this alive,' Miss Boyd-Galloway remarked, leaning back philosophically; 'but if we do, Louisa, I shall certainly get Gascoyne's license taken away, or have him well fined at Uncle Edward's petty sessions for reckless driving.'

At the corner by the larches the horses turned sharp into the main road. They turned so abruptly that they almost upset

the cab and its precious freight. Miss Boyd-Galloway's patient soul could stand it no longer. In spite of the cold air and the driving snow, she opened the window wide, pushed out her woollen-enveloped head, and expostulated vigorously : ' If you don't take more care, Gascoyne, I shall have you fined. You're endangering our lives. You've been drinking, I'm sure. Pull yourself together, man, and drive carefully now, or else we'll get out and walk, and then report you.'

Sir Emery essayed an inarticulate answer. But his breath was feeble, and the words stuck in his throat. Miss Boyd-Galloway withdrew her indignant head more angry than ever. ' He's absolutely stupid and dumb with drink,' she said, musing with positive pleasure over the cabman's delinquencies. ' He can't get out a word. He's too drunk to sit straight. It'll be a mercy if we all get back alive. But I'm morally confident we won't, so make up your mind for the worst, Louisa.'

Near the entrance to the town, Miss Boyd-Galloway didn't notice through the dimmed window-panes that their coachman

was taking them in the wrong direction. Or, rather, to speak more accurately, the horses, now left to their own devices, were returning at their own pace to their familiar stable.

They plodded along slowly, slowly now, for the snow on the road grew ever deeper and deeper. Their gait was reduced to a shambling walk, with occasional interludes of stumbling and slipping. Miss Boyd-Galloway's wrath waxed deep and still. She didn't remonstrate any longer: she felt sure in her own heart Gascoyne had got beyond all that long since: she meditated 'fourteen days without the option of a fine' as the very slightest punishment Uncle Edward could in reason award him.

Finally, and suddenly, a jerk, a halt. They turned unexpectedly down a narrow side-entrance. Miss Boyd-Galloway was aware of a courtlike shadow. Houses rose sheer around her on every side. Surely, surely, this was not the Priory, not the paternal mansion. Miss Boyd-Galloway put out her head and looked about her once more. 'Oh, Louisa, Louisa, what on earth

are we to do?' she cried, in impotent despair. 'The man's so drunk that, instead of taking us home, he's allowed the horses to come back to their own stables!'

'I shall get out this minute and walk!' her friend ejaculated sleepily.

They got out and stood by the side of the cab. 'Now, Gascoyne,' Miss Boyd-Galloway began in a very shrill tone, 'this is really too bad. You're asleep on the box, sir. Wake up, I say; wake up now, will you?'

But Sir Emery sat stiff and stark in his place, and never heeded even the admonition of Miss Boyd-Galloway's stout umbrella poked hard against his side in practical remonstrance.

As they stood there, wondering, the back door of the house was flung open wide, and Faith Gascoyne, with her head uncovered, rushed hastily out into the dark, cold courtyard. She took no notice of the two ladies who stood there, shivering, in their wraps and shawls, on the snow-clad stones, but darted wildly forward towards the figure on

the box. 'Father, father!' she cried in an agonized voice, 'are you all right, darling?'

'No, he's *not* all right,' Miss Boyd-Galloway answered testily, retreating towards the passage. 'He's anything but right, and you ought to be ashamed of him. He's as drunk as an owl, and he's brought us back here to his own place, instead of taking us home as he ought to the Priory.'

But Faith paid little heed to the lady's words. She was far too agitated and frightened for that. She flung her arms wildly round that stiff, stark figure, and kissed its mouth over and over again with a terrible foreboding. Sir Emery sat there unheeding still. Then Faith started back aghast, with a sudden flash of discovery, and held up her hands in an agony of horror and alarm to heaven. A fierce cry burst inarticulately from her quivering lips. 'He's dead!' she sobbed out in her agony. 'He's dead! Oh, father, father!'

And so he was. He had died in harness. 'Acute pleurisy, aggravated by exposure,' the doctor called it in his official statement next day. But for the present, all Faith

knew and felt was that her father was gone, and that she stood there that moment alone in her bereavement.

In time, as she stood there, helpless and unnerved, a neighbour or two came out and carried him in. He was quite, quite dead : almost as stiff and cold as stone with the frost already. They laid him down tenderly on the horsehair sofa in the little parlour. Sir Emery Gascoyne, Baronet, had met his death well, performing his duty.

And Miss Boyd-Galloway in the yard without, staring hard at her friend and wringing her hands, remarked more than once in a hushed voice, ‘ This is very awkward indeed, Louisa ! How on earth are we to get home without any carriage, I wonder ? I really believe we shall have to tramp it ! ’

## CHAPTER XXXI.

‘LE ROI EST MORT: VIVE LE ROI!’

WITH a heavy heart and with vague forebodings of evil, Paul tramped wearily home along the frozen roadway. As he neared Plowden’s Court, at the end of that slow and painful march, he saw for himself there were lights in the windows, and signs within of great bustle and commotion.

Cold as it was and late at night, the news had already spread over the neighbourhood that ‘Gascoyne was gone,’ and more than one sympathizing friend had risen from bed and dropped in to comfort Faith and her mother in their great sorrow. The working classes and the smaller tradesfolk are prompter and franker in their expressions of sympathy with one another than those whom

in our self-satisfied way we call their betters. They come to help in the day of trouble, where servants and dependents are not ready at call to do the mere necessary physical work entailed on every house by moments of bereavement.

At the door Mr. Solomons was waiting to receive the poor weary young man. He raised his hat respectfully as Paul straggled in. 'Good-evening, Sir Paul,' he said with marked courtesy. And that unwonted salute was the first intimation Paul received of his sudden and terrible loss that awful evening.

'No, no, Mr. Solomons,' he cried, grasping the old man's hand with the fervid warmth which rises up spontaneous within us all at moments of deep emotion. 'Not that! not that! Don't tell me so! don't tell me so! Not that! He isn't dead! Not dead! Oh no, not dead! Don't say so!'

Mr. Solomons shook his head gravely. 'Doctor's been here and found him quite dead,' he answered with solemn calmness. 'He drove Miss Boyd-Galloway back from the Dean's through the snow and wind till he froze on the box. He was too ill to go,



and he died at his post, like a Gascoyne ought to do.'

Paul flung himself back on a chair and burst at once into a wild flood of tears. His heart was full. He didn't dare to ask for Faith or his mother. Yet, even in that first full flush of a great sorrow, strange to say, he was dimly conscious within himself of that indefinable self-satisfaction which so buoys us up for the moment under similar circumstances. He felt it would always be a comfort to him to remember that he had done his very best to avert that terrible incident, had done his very best to take his father's place that night, and to follow in his footsteps on his last sad journey.

Mr. Solomons moved slowly to the foot of the stairs. 'Sir Paul has returned,' he called softly to Faith in the room above, where she sat and sobbed beside her dead father.

And, indeed, from that time forth Mr. Solomons seldom forgot to give the new baronet the full benefit of his title whenever he spoke to him, and to exact the rigorous use of it from all and sundry. It was part of his claims on Paul, in fact, that Paul

should accept the heavy burden of the baronetcy. Meaning to float him in the social and financial sense, Mr. Solomons appreciated the immense importance of starting Sir Paul as Sir Paul Gascoyne, Baronet, from the very beginning. It must be understood at the outset that this was a genuine titled Gascoyne, and no shadow of a doubt or an incognito of any sort must hang over the fact or the nature of the evidence. It was all very well for Sir Emery to hide his light under a bushel in a country town ; but Sir Paul, as exhibited by his financial adviser, must be carefully proclaimed from the housetops in the city of Westminster.

In his own interests Mr. Solomons was determined that everybody should recognise his *protégé* as a man of fashion.

Faith came down and threw herself into her brother's arms. ‘You did your best, Paul,’ she cried, faltering ; ‘I know it, I know it !’

The tears stood dim in Mr. Solomons' eyes. He could stand an execution for debt with stoical stolidity, but he could not stand this. He took out his pocket-handkerchief and

retired into the stairway, leaving brother and sister to their own silent sympathy.

Slowly and gradually it came home to each of them how great a change that night had wrought in their joint existences. The old life at Hillborough would now be broken up for them both altogether. New ways and fields lay open before them.

The next few days, indeed, were of course taken up by the needful preparations for Sir Emery's funeral. It was a new sensation for Paul to find himself the head of the family, with his mother and sister dependent upon him for aid and advice, and compelled to decide all questions as they arose upon his own responsibility. Mr. Solomons, however, who had his good side, though he kept it often most studiously in the background, was kindness itself to Paul in this sudden emergency. To say the truth, he liked the young man; and, with his ingrained Jewish respect for rank, he was proud of being able to patronize a real British baronet. He had patronized Sir Emery already, to be sure; but, then, Sir Emery had never been born in the purple. He was at best but a country

cabman who had unexpectedly inherited a barren baronetcy. It was otherwise with Paul. Mr. Solomons was determined that, as his young friend had had an Oxford education, so he should be received everywhere from the very beginning in his own proper place in English society. The fact was, Mr. Solomons' relations with Paul had made him feel, at last, a certain parental interest in his young debtor's position and prospects. Regarding him at first merely in the light of a precarious investment, to be diligently exploited for Mr. Lionel's ultimate benefit, he had come in the end to regard him with some personal liking and fondness, as a pupil with whose progress in life he might be fairly satisfied. So he came out well on this occasion—so well, indeed, that for several days after the sad event he never mentioned to Paul the disagreeable fact about his having neglected to pay Sir Emery's life-premium on the very day of that fatal engagement.

The neglect left Paul still more heavily indebted than he might otherwise have been. But as he had voluntarily assumed all

responsibility for the debt himself, he had really nothing on this ground to complain of.

The funeral was fixed for Wednesday, the tenth. On Tuesday afternoon, as Paul sat alone in the little front parlour with the spotted dog on the mantelpiece—that spotted dog of his father's that Faith had so longed for years to remove, and that she wouldn't now have removed from its familiar place for untold thousands—he heard a well-known sturdy voice inquire of the stable-boy who lounged about the door, 'Is this Sir Paul Gascoyne's? Does he happen to be in? Will you give him my card, then?'

With no shadow of shame or compunction on his face, Paul flung open the door and welcomed his old college friend into that dingy little sitting-room. 'Why, Thistleton,' he cried, 'this is so kind, so good of you! You're the only one of all my Oxford acquaintances who's come to see me, although, of course, I didn't expect them. But you were in Yorkshire last week and meant to stay there. What on earth's brought you down to this part of England so suddenly?'

The blond young man's face on receiving

this question was a study to behold. It would have made the fortune of a rising dramatic artist. He changed his hat in his hand awkwardly as he answered with a distinctly shame-faced air : ' I thought—as a mark of respect for the family—I—I ought to be present at Sir Emery's funeral. And, indeed, my father and mother thought that, in view of existing and future circumstances, I couldn't possibly absent myself.'

Paul failed to grasp the precise reason for this interposition on the part of the senior Thistletons in so strictly private and personal an affair as his father's funeral ; for as yet he had no idea of the state of relations between Faith and his friend, but he confined himself for the moment to asking in some surprise, ' Why, how did you hear at all about my poor father ?'

The blond young man hesitated even more remarkably and distinctly than before. Then he blurted out the truth with that simple-hearted directness of speech which was natural to him : ' Faith wrote and told me,' he answered in his straightforwardness.

It struck Paul as odd, even in that time

of trouble, that Thistleton should speak of his sister as 'Faith' and not as 'Miss Gascoyne,' as he had always been accustomed to do at Oxford; but he set it down to the privilege of intimacy with the family, and to the greater frankness of tongue which we all of us use when death breaks down for a moment the conventions and barriers of our artificial intercourse. Still, it certainly did strike him as odd that Faith should have found time at such a moment to write of their loss to a mere casual acquaintance.

Thistleton rightly interpreted the puzzled look upon Paul's face, and went on sheepishly, though with charming frankness: 'I hadn't heard for several days, much longer than usual, indeed, so I telegraphed night before last to ask the reason.'

Then a light burst in all at once upon Paul's mind; he saw it all, and was glad, but he forbore to speak of it under existing circumstances.

'Might I see Faith?' the blond young man inquired timidly.

'I'll ask her,' Paul answered, moving slowly up the stairs to the room where his

sister sat alone in her grief with their mother.

But Faith only shook her head very decidedly. 'Not now, Paul,' she said; 'it was kind of him to come, but tell him I can't see him—till, till after to-morrow.'

'Perhaps he won't stay,' Paul put in, without attaching much importance himself to the remark.

'Oh yes!' Faith answered with simple confidence. 'Now he's once come he'll stop, of course—at least, until he's seen me.'

Paul went back to his friend in the dull little parlour. To his immense surprise, Thistleton, after receiving the message with a frank, satisfied nod, began at once talking about the family plans with an interest that really astonished him. Paul had always liked the blond young man, and he knew the blond young man liked him. {But he was hardly prepared for so much personal sympathy in all their arrangements as Thistleton manifested. The blond young man was most anxious to know where Paul would live and what he would do; whether or not he would at once assume his title; what would



become of his mother and Faith ; and whether the family headquarters were likely under these new circumstances to be shifted from Hillborough, say, in the direction of London.

All these questions took Paul very much at a disadvantage. Absorbed only in their own immediate and personal loss, he had found no time as yet to think or arrange in any way about the future. All he could say was that he would consider these things at some later time, but that for the moment their plans were wholly undecided.

Thistleton sat still and gazed blankly into the fire. 'I shall have to talk it all over with Faith, you know,' he said quietly at last. 'I see many reasons for taking things promptly in hand at the moment of the crisis.'

'I'm afraid Faith won't be able to talk things over calmly for some weeks at least,' Paul answered, with deepening wonderment. 'This sudden blow, of course, has quite unnerved us. It was all so instantaneous, so terrible, so unexpected.'

'Oh, I'm in no hurry,' Thistleton replied, still gazing straight ahead into the embers

of the fire. 'Now I'm here I may as well stop here for the next few weeks or so. They've given me a very comfortable room at the Red Lion. And one thing's clear, now your father's gone, Gascoyne, you've enough to do with those Claims alone; your sister mustn't be allowed to be a further burden upon you.'

Paul flushed fiery hot at that way of putting it. He saw now quite clearly what Thistleton was driving at, though he didn't know, of course, what measure of encouragement Faith might already have accorded her wealthy suitor. Oh, those hateful, hateful Claims of Mr. Solomons'! If it hadn't been for those, he might have answered proudly, 'I will take care myself of my sister's future.' But how could he now—he who was mortgaged, twenty years deep, for all his possible earnings to that close-fisted taskmaster? The very thought of it made him hot and cold alternately with deep humiliation.

All he could do was to murmur, half aloud, 'Faith can almost support herself, even as it is, by her salary as a school-mistress.'

Thistleton answered him very decisively this time. 'Not as she ought to be supported, my dear fellow,' he said in a firm tone of voice. 'Gascoyne, you and I have always been friends, and at a time like this we may surely speak our minds out to one another. You'll have enough to do to keep yourself and your mother, let alone the Claims; and I know how they weigh upon you. But Faith mustn't dream of trying to live upon what she earns herself. I could never stand that. It would drive me wild to think she should even attempt it. This has made a great change in the position of all of you. I think when I talk it all over with Faith she'll see the subject in the same light as I do.'

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE BUBBLE BURSTS.

THE morning after the funeral Paul went down, by Mr. Solomons' special desire, to the office in the High Street for a solemn consultation. Mr. Solomons wished to see him 'on important business,' he said; and Paul, though weary and sick at heart, had been too long accustomed to accept Mr. Solomons' commands as law to think of demurring to a request so worded.

As he entered, Mr. Solomons rose to greet him with stately politeness, and handed him solemnly a little oblong packet, which felt like a box done up in paper. Paul opened it vaguely, seeing so much was expected of him, and found inside, to his immense surprise, a hundred visiting-cards,

inscribed in copperplate 'Sir Paul Gascoyne,' in neat small letters.

'What are these, Mr. Solomons?' he asked, taken aback for the moment.

Mr. Solomons, rubbing his hands with unction, was evidently very well pleased at his own cleverness and forethought. 'They're a little present I wished to make you, Sir Paul,' he answered, laying great stress upon that emphatic prefix of honour. 'You see, I think it necessary, as part of my scheme for our joint benefit, that you should at once assume your proper place in the world and receive recognition at the hands of society. I desire that you should make a feature of your title at once; that you should be known to all England from the very outset as Sir Paul Gascoyne, Baronet.' He spoke it pompously, like one who basked in the reflected glory of that high-sounding social designation.

'I hate it!' Paul blurted out, unable to restrain his emotion any longer. 'Mr. Solomons, I can't bear the whole horrid business. It's a hollow mockery for a man like me. What's the use of a title to a

fellow without a penny, who's burdened with more debt than he can ever pay, to start with ?'

Mr. Solomons drew back as if he had been stung. He could hardly believe his ears. That a man should wish deliberately to shuffle off the honour of a baronetcy was to him, in his simplicity, well-nigh inconceivable. Not that for the moment he took in to the full Paul's actual meaning. That his pet design, the cherished scheme of years, could be upset offhand by the recalcitrant obstinacy of a hot-headed youth just fresh from college, lay hardly within the sphere of his comprehension. He contented himself for the time with thrusting his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, protruding his already too obvious watch-pocket, and observing jauntily :

'That's exactly why you've got to make the most of the title, Sir Paul. You must use it as your capital—your stock-in-trade. So long as your father lived, of course, we could do very little ; we could only point to you as a prospective baronet. Now that Sir Emery's dead and gone, poor gentleman ! the case is

altered; we can put you forward as the actual possessor of the Gascoyne title. It's extremely fortunate this should have happened (as it had got to happen) so early in the year, before the Peerages are out—they don't publish them till March—and I telegraphed off full details yesterday to the different editors, so that your name may appear in its proper place in due course in the new issues. There's nothing like taking Time by the forelock, you know, Sir Paul; there's nothing on earth like taking Time by the forelock.' And Mr. Solomons, standing with his back to the fire and his thumbs in his armholes like a British churchwarden, raised himself gently on the tips of his toes, and let his heels go down again with an emphatic snap, as he pursed up his lips into a most determined attitude.

Paul saw the time for temporizing was passed. While his father lived, he hadn't dared to explain to Mr. Solomons the simple fact that he couldn't and wouldn't sell himself for money to any woman living, lest he should break his father's heart by that plain avowal. But now it would be flat cowardice

to delay the confession one day longer. For Mr. Solomons' sake he must take the bull by the horns. Already Mr. Solomons had put himself to needless expense in having those cards printed and in telegraphing to the editors of the various Peerages, on the strength of an understanding which ought long ago to have been broken. There was no help for it now. He must prick the bubble.

So he seated himself nervously in the office-chair, and with hesitating speech, amid awkward pauses, began to break the news as gently as he could to poor startled Mr. Solomons. He told him how as long as his father lived he had felt it his duty to keep silence on the matter. He explained to him in plain and straightforward terms how the plan had been devised and broached and furthered when he himself was too young to understand and enter into its sinister significance ; and how, as soon as he had attained to years of discretion, and comprehended the plot in its true colours, a revulsion of feeling had set in which made it impossible for him now to carry out in full the implied engage-



ment. He begged Mr. Solomons to observe that as soon as he had clearly realized this change of front he had ceased to accept a single penny of his taskmaster's money, but had worked his own way by unheard-of effort through his last two terms for his degree at Oxford. Finally, he assured Mr. Solomons, with many piteous assurances, that he would never be forgetful of the claims upon his purse, his time, and his labour, but would toil like a slave, month after month and year after year, till he had repaid him in full to the uttermost farthing.

How much it cost Paul to make this bold avowal nobody but himself could ever have realized. He felt at the moment as though he was shirking the dearest obligations in life, and turning his back most ungratefully upon his friend and benefactor. As he went on and on, floundering deeper and deeper in despondency each moment, while Mr. Solomons stood there silent and grim by the fireplace, with his jaw now dropping loose and his thumbs relaxing their hold upon the armholes, his voice faltered with the profundity of his regret, and big beads

of nervous dew gathered thick upon his forehead. He knew he was disappointing the hopes of a lifetime, and shaking his own credit at every word he spoke with his powerful creditor.

As for Mr. Solomons, the startled old man heard him out to the bitter end without once interposing a single word of remark—without so much as a nod or a shake of disapprobation. He heard him out in the grimmest of grim silences, letting Paul flounder on, unchecked and unaided, through his long rambling explanation of his conduct and motives. Once or twice, indeed, Paul paused in his speech and glanced up at him appealingly; but Mr. Solomons, staring at him still with a fixed hard stare, vouchsafed not even to relax his stern face, and gazed on in blank astonishment at this strange case of mental aberration gradually unfolding itself in the flesh before him. At last, when Paul had exhausted all his stock of arguments, excuses, and reasons, Mr. Solomons moved forward three deliberate paces, and, gazing straight down into the young man's eyes, said slowly and solemnly in the Scrip-

tural phrase, 'Paul, Paul, thou art beside thyself.'

'Mr. Solomons,' Paul answered with a cold shudder down his back, 'I mean what I say. You shall never lose a penny of all you've advanced me. You meant it well. You meant it for my advantage. I know all that. But I can never consent to marry an heiress, whoever she may be. I'll work my fingers to the bone, day and night, the year round, to pay you back ; but I'll never, never, never consent to pay you back the way you intended.'

'You mean it?' Mr. Solomons asked, sitting down in another chair by his side and regarding him closely with curious attention. 'Sir Paul Gascoyne, you really mean it?'

'Yes, I really mean it, Mr. Solomons,' Paul answered remorsefully.

To his immense astonishment, Mr. Solomons buried his face in his arms on the office table and sobbed inarticulately, through floods of tears, in dead silence, for some minutes together.

This strange proceeding, so utterly un-

expected, broke down for the moment Paul's courage altogether. 'Oh, Mr. Solomons,' he cried, in a frenzy of regret, 'I knew I should be disappointing you very much indeed—I knew that, of course; but I never imagined you'd feel like this about it.'

Mr. Solomons rocked himself up and down in his chair solemnly for a considerable time without making any answer. Then he rose slowly, unlocked his safe, and took out the well-thumbed bundle of notes and acceptances. One by one he counted them all over, as if to make sure they were really there, with a regretful touch; after which, regarding them tenderly, as a mother regards her favourite child, he locked them all up once more, and flung himself back in the office-chair with an air of utter and abject despondency. 'As long as you live, Sir Paul,' he said slowly, 'handicapped as you are, unless you do as we mean you to do, you can never, never, never repay them.'

'I'll try my hardest, at least,' Paul answered sturdily.

'There's the horses and cabs,' Mr. Solomons went on, as if musing to himself; 'but

they won't fetch much. As for the furniture in the house, it wouldn't pay the quarter's rent, I expect; and to that extent the landlord, of course, has a prior claim upon it. In fact, it's an insolvent estate—that's the long and the short of it.'

'My father's life was insured,' Paul ventured to suggest.

Mr. Solomons hesitated with natural delicacy.

'Well, to tell you the truth, Sir Paul,' he answered after a long pause, 'the premium was due the day before your father's unfortunate death, and I neglected to pay it. I meant to do so the very next morning, but was too late. But I didn't like to mention the fact to you before, in the midst of so much other personal trouble.'

'That was very kind of you, Mr. Solomons,' Paul put in in a very low voice.

Mr. Solomons ran his fat hand through his curly black hair, now deeply grizzled.

'Not at all, Sir Paul,' he answered, 'not at all. Of course, I couldn't dream of obtruding it on you at such a time. But what I was thinking 's this—that the failure of the

policy largely increases the amount of your indebtedness. It was "jointly and severally" from the beginning, you remember; and when you came of age you took the entire responsibility upon yourself in this very room here.'

And Mr. Solomons walked once more towards the safe in the corner, as if to assure himself again of the safety, at least, of those precious papers.

'I admit it to the full,' Paul answered frankly.

Mr. Solomons turned upon him with unexpected gentleness.

'Sir Paul,' he said seriously, 'my dear Sir Paul, it isn't so much that—that's not the worst of it. It's the other disappointment I mind the most—the strictly personal and private disappointment. The money I'll get paid back in the end; or, if I don't live to see it paid back, why, Leo will, and I always regarded it as a long investment for Leo. A man sinks his money in land for the rise as long as that, every bit, and is satisfied if his children come in for the benefit of it. But, Sir Paul, I thought of you always as a

success in life—as great and rich—as married to a lady you ought to marry—as holding your own in the county and the country. I thought of you as sitting in Parliament for a division of Surrey. I thought I'd have helped to make you all that ; and I thought you'd feel I'd had a hand in doing it. Instead of that, I've only hung a weight like a millstone round your neck, that I never intended—a weight that you'll never be able to get rid of. Sir Paul ! Sir Paul ! it's a terrible disappointment.'

Paul sat there long, talking the matter over from every possible point of view, now perfectly friendly, but never getting any nearer to a reconciliation of their conflicting ideas. Indeed, how could he ? When he rose to go, Mr. Solomons grasped his hand hard.

'Sir Paul,' he said with emotion, 'this is a hard day's work. You've undone the task I've been toiling at for years. But perhaps in time you'll change your mind. Perhaps some day you'll see some lady——'

Paul cut him short at once.

'No, never,' he said. 'Never.'

Mr. Solomons shook his hand hard once more.

‘Well, never mind,’ he said; ‘remember, I don’t want in any way to press you. Repay me whenever and however you can; it’s all running on at interest meanwhile, renewable annually. Work hard and pay me, but not too hard. I trust you still, Sir Paul, and I know I can trust you.’

As soon as Paul was gone, Mr. Solomons could only relieve his mind by taking the first train up to town, and pouring the whole strange, incredible story into the sympathetic ears of his nephew, Mr. Lionel.

Lionel Solomons listened to his uncle’s narrative with supercilious disdain; then he rose, with his sleek thumbs stuck into his waistcoat pockets and his fat fingers lolling over his well-covered hips, in an attitude expressive of capitalist indifference to such mere sentimentalism as Paul Gascoyne had been guilty of.

‘The fellow’s of age, and he’s signed for the lot, that’s one comfort,’ he observed complacently. ‘But I’ve got no patience with such pig-headed nonsense myself. What’s



the good of being born to a baronetcy, I should like to know, if you ain't going to make any social use of it ?

‘It’s chucking it away—just chucking it away—that’s true,’ his uncle assented.

Mr. Lionel paused, and ran one plump hand easily through his well-oiled curls.

‘For my part,’ he said, ‘if ever those papers come to me——’

‘They’ll all come to you, Leo ; they’ll all come to you,’ his uncle put in affectionately. ‘What else do I toil and moil and slave and save for ?’

Mr. Lionel faintly bowed a gracious acquiescence.

‘If ever those papers come to me,’ he continued, unheeding the interruption, ‘I’ll not let him off one farthing of the lot, now he’s signed for ’em all after coming of age—not if he works his life long to pay me off the whole, principal and interest. He shall suffer for his confounded nonsense, he shall. If he won’t pay up, as he ought to pay up, in a lump at once, and if he won’t go to work the right way to make himself solvent, I’ll grind him and dun him and make his life

a burden to him, till he's paid it all to the uttermost farthing. He's a fool of a sentimentalist, that's just what he is—with an American girl ready to pay him a good round sum for the title, as I've reason to believe, if he'll only marry her.'

'Leo!' his uncle exclaimed disapprovingly.

'I'll tell you what it is,' the nephew continued, tilting himself on tiptoe, and shutting his mouth hard till the lips pursed up to express decision of character, 'the fellow's in love with some penniless girl or other. I've known that a long time; he was always getting letters from some place in Cornwall, in a woman's hand, that he put away unopened, and read in his bedroom; and he's going to throw overboard your interest and his own, just to satisfy his own foolish, sentimental fancy. I could forgive him for throwing yours overboard for a pretty face, for that's only human; but to throw over his own, why, it's simply inexcusable. He shall pay for this, though. If ever I come in to those papers he shall pay for it!

'Leo,' the elder man said, leaning back in

his chair and fixing his eye full upon his uncompromising nephew.

‘Well, sir,’ Mr. Lionel answered, replacing his thumbs in his waistcoat-pocket.

‘Leo,’ Mr. Solomons repeated slowly, ‘I often wish you were a little more like Paul. I often wish I’d sent you, instead of him, to Oxford to college.’

‘Well, *I* don’t, then,’ Mr. Lionel responded, with a short toss of his head. ‘I’m precious glad you put me where I am—in the proper place for a man to make money in—in the City.’

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### FASHIONABLE INTELLIGENCE.

THE air of Surrey suited the blond young man's complaint to a T. Thistleton spent some two or three weeks at Hillborough, and seemed in no very great hurry to return to the bleak North from his comfortable quarters at the Red Lion. Meanwhile Paul was busy clearing up his father's affairs, selling what few effects there remained to sell, and handing over the proceeds, after small debts paid, as remnant of the insolvent estate, to Mr. Solomons. Mr. Solomons received the sum with grim satisfaction ; it was a first instalment of those terrible Claims of his, and better than nothing ; so he proceeded to release a single small note accordingly, which he burnt in the office fire before Paul's very face, with due

solemnity. Then, as if to impress on his young friend's mind the magnitude of the amount that still remained unpaid, he counted over the rest of the bills in long array, jointly and severally, and locked them up once more with his burglar-proof key—Chubb's best design—in that capacious safe of his.

Much yet remained for Paul to arrange. The family had now to be organized on a fresh basis ; for it was clear that in future the new baronet must support his mother, and to some extent, apparently, his sister also. His own wish, indeed, was that they should both accompany him to London ; but to that revolutionary proposal his mother would never for a moment accede. She had lived all her life long at Hillborough, she said, among her own people, and she couldn't be dragged away now, in her old age, from her husband's grave and her accustomed surroundings. Paul thought it best, therefore, to arrange for a couple of rooms in a cottage in Plowden's Court, hard by, where Faith and she might take up their abode for the present.

It was only for the present, however, so far as Faith was concerned. For before Thistle-

ton left Hillborough he had sat one afternoon with Faith in the bare little parlour, and there, before the impassive face of the spotted dog, once more discussed that important question which he had broached to her last spring in the flowery meadows at Ensham. At first, of course, Faith would have nothing to say to any such subversive scheme. She wouldn't leave her mother, she said, alone in her widowhood. She must stay with her and comfort her, now nobody else was left to help her. But Thistleton had a strong card to play this time in the necessity for relieving Paul of any unnecessary burden.

'Faith,' he said, taking her hand in his own persuasively—there is much virtue in a gentle pressure of the human hand—'you know you as good as promised me at Oxford, and we only put it off till a more convenient season.'

'Why, I never promised you, Mr. Thistleton,' Faith retorted, half angry.

'I said, you *as good as promised me*,' the blond young man corrected, unperturbed. 'We left it open. But now, you know, Paul's left the sole support of the entire family, and

it becomes your duty to try and relieve him as far as possible. If you and I were married, your mother could often come and stop with us for a time—in Sheffield or London; and, at any rate, Paul would be freed from all anxiety on your account. For my part, I think it's a duty you owe him.'

'I won't marry anyone as a duty to Paul,' Faith exclaimed firmly, bridling up like a Gascoyne, and trying to withdraw her fingers from the hand that imprisoned them.

'I don't ask you to,' Thistleton answered, with another soothing movement of that consolatory palm. 'You know very well it isn't that: I want you for yourself. I telegraphed to my people last spring: "The lady accepts, but defers for the present." So, you see, the question of marrying me was settled long ago. It's only the question of *when* that we have to talk about now. And I say this is a very convenient time, because it'll make it a great deal easier for Paul to arrange about your mother and himself comfortably.'

'There's something in that,' Faith admitted with a grudging assent.

So the end of it all was that, after many

protests, Faith gave in at last to a proposal to be married in March—a very quiet wedding, of course, because of their deep mourning; but, as Thistleton justly remarked, with a triumphant sigh of relief, a wedding's a wedding, however quiet you make it, and it was Faith, not the festivities, that he himself attached the greatest importance to.

At the end of three weeks, therefore, the blond young man returned to Yorkshire with victory in his van (whatever that may be); and Mrs. Thistleton senior was in a position to call upon all her neighbours in Sheffield—master-cutlers' wives every one of them to a woman—with the proud announcement that her son Charles was to be married in March to the sister of his Oxford friend, Sir Paul Gascoyne, Baronet, who had lately succeeded to his father's title. And all the other ladies in Sheffield looked out the baronetcy in Debrett forthwith, as in duty bound; and when they found it was quite an ancient creation, of seventeenth-century date, and unconnected with cutlery, were ready to die with envy to think that that fat old Mrs. Thistleton, a person in no wise richer or more



distinguished than themselves, should become connected at last with most undoubted aristocracy.

At Hillborough, meanwhile, the sister and daughter of those noble fourteenth and fifteenth baronets had a busy time in her own small room, making such preparations as she was able for that quiet wedding, which must nevertheless tax the family resources to the very utmost. Indeed, it gave Paul no small qualms of conscience to buy the strict necessities for so important an occasion; for how could he devote to his sister's needful outfit—the outfit indispensable for the wedding-day itself, if she was not to put the Thistleton family to open shame—a single penny of his precarious earnings, without neglecting the just claims of Mr. Solomons? Paul felt even more painfully than ever before how he was tied hand and foot to his remorseless creditor. It was impossible for him to spend money on anything beyond the barest necessities without feeling he was wronging his universal assignee.

However, he put it to himself on this special occasion that for Faith to be married,

and to be married well, was, after all, the very best thing in the end for Mr. Solomons' interests. It would leave him freer to earn money with which ultimately to repay those grinding Claims ; and so he judged he might honestly devote part of his still very modest income to buying what was most indispensable for Faith's wedding. Faith herself, with the help of the little dressmaker from the neighbouring court, would do all the rest ; and, fortunately, their mourning gave them a good excuse for making the wedding preparations on the smallest possible scale of expenditure under the circumstances.

So as soon as everything was arranged at Hillborough, and Faith and her mother fairly settled into modest lodgings, Paul returned once more for a day to his rooms in Pimlico. But it was only in order to remove his books and belongings from the chambers he shared with Mr. Lionel Solomons to a new address across the City. The welcome change had been forced upon him by his interview with his old provider. Mr. Lionel's society had never been agreeable to him ; and now that he had cleared up

matters with the uncle at Hillborough, Paul saw no reason why he should any longer put up with the nephew's company in London. Besides, he contemplated now living on a still more modest basis than before, since it would be needful for him in future to support his mother as well as himself out of his journalistic earnings.

Mr. Lionel met his proposals for removal with a shrug of contempt. 'I suppose now you're a baronet,' he said, just suppressing a decent sneer, 'you think yourself too fine to associate any longer with City gentlemen?'

'On the contrary,' Paul answered, 'now that I shall have to keep my mother as well as myself, I must manage to do with smaller and cheaper lodgings.'

'Well, you're a devilish odd fellow!' Mr. Lionel remarked, with a cheerful smile, provoked in part by the sight of an embossed coronet that just peeped from the corner of a dainty note on the mantelpiece. 'If *I* were a baronet, I wouldn't do like you, you may bet your last sixpence. If I didn't intend to marry tin, at any rate I'd go in for

making money in a modest way as a guinea-pig.'

Paul's ignorance of City ways was so profound that he answered with a puzzled expression of countenance: 'What is a guinea-pig?'

'A guinea-pig,' Mr. Lionel condescended to explain, gazing down with approbation at his own well-filled waistcoat—'a guinea-pig is a gentleman of birth, rank, title, or position, who accepts a seat at a board as director of a company, which he guarantees by his name, receiving in return a guinea a day every time he attends a meeting of the directorate. For example, let's suppose I want to start an Automatic Pork Pie Company, or a Universal Artificial Guano Supply Association, Limited. Very well, then: I promote the company myself, and get two or three City people—good men, of course—to back me up in it. And I ask you to let me print your name at the head of the list. Directors: Sir Paul Gascoyne, Bart.; Timothy Twells, Esquire (Twells, Twemlow, and Handsomebody); and so forth and so forth. You give your name

and you draw your guinea. We consider the advertisement worth that amount to us. And a person who lives by so lending his name to industrial undertakings is called a guinea-pig.'

'But I couldn't be a director of a public company,' Paul answered, smiling. 'I don't know anything at all about business.'

'Of course not,' Mr. Lionel retorted. 'That's just where it is. If you did, you'd be meddling and inquiring into the affair. That's exactly the good of you. What we particularly require in an ideal guinea-pig is that he should attend his meeting and take his fee and ask no questions. Otherwise, he's apt to be a confounded nuisance to the working directorate.'

'But I call that dishonest,' Paul exclaimed warmly. 'A man lends his name, and his title if he has one, if I understand what you mean, in order to induce the public at large to believe this is a solid concern, with an influential board of directors; and you want him to do it for a guinea a day without so much as inquiring into the solidity of the undertaking!'

Mr. Lionel's face relaxed into a broad

smile. 'Well, you *are* a rum one!' he answered, much amused at Paul's indignant warmth. 'I don't want you to do it. It don't matter tuppence either way to me whether you sink or swim. You're at liberty to starve, so far as I'm concerned, in the most honest and Quixotic way that seems good to you. All I say is that if I were you I'd go in, for the present—till something neat turns up in the matrimonial line—for being a professional guinea-pig. I throw out the hint for your consideration, free, gratis, given away for nothing. If you don't like it you're at liberty to leave it. But you needn't jump down a man's throat, for all that, with your moral remarks, as if I was an idiot.'

'I don't care to sell my name for money to anybody,' Paul answered, growing hot: 'either to men or women. I never sought the title myself: it's been thrust upon me by circumstances, and I suppose I must take it. But if I bear it at all, I trust I shall so bear it as to bring no disgrace upon my honest ancestors. I will lend it or sell it to nobody for my own advantage.'

‘So my uncle informed me,’ Mr. Lionel answered, showing his even teeth in a very ugly smile, and once more ogling that corcneted note-paper; ‘and I’ll tell you what I think of you, Gascoyne—I think you’re a fool for your pains: that’s just my candid opinion of you! you’re a sight too sentimental, that’s where it is, with these notions and ideas of yours! You’ll find when you’ve mixed a little more with the world, as I’ve done in the City, you’ll have to come down a bit at last from that precious high horse of yours. If you don’t, he’ll throw you, and then there’ll be an end of you! And I’ve got another thing to tell you, too, now I’m once about it. My uncle Judah ain’t as strong a man by any means as he looks. His heart’s affected. His doctor tells me so. He can’t stand running about too much. Some day he’ll go running to catch a train, getting too much excited over a matter of a bargain, or putting himself in a fluster at an execution; and hi presto! before he knows where he is, his heart’ll go pop and there’ll be the end of him.’

‘Well?’ Paul said, drawing his breath slowly, with a faint apprehension of Mr. Lionel’s probable meaning.

‘Well, then,’ Mr. Lionel went on, unmoved, that ugly smile growing more marked than before, ‘I’ll inherit every stiver my uncle leaves—and, amongst the rest, those precious notes-of-hand of yours.’

‘Yes,’ Paul answered, growing uncomfortably warm again.

‘Yes,’ Mr. Lionel repeated, fixing his man with those nasty eyes of his; ‘and I’ll tell you what, Gascoyne—Sir Paul Gascoyne, Baronet—you’ll find you’ve got a very different sort of man to deal with from my uncle Judah. Sentimentality won’t go down with me, I can tell you. It ain’t my line of country. You think you can do as you like with my uncle, because he takes a sort of personal interest in you, and feels proud of you as his own tame live baronet that he’s raised by hand, and sent to college at his own expense, and floated in the world, and made a gentleman of. You think you can force him to wait as long



as you like for his money. But mark my words—my uncle's life ain't worth a year's purchase. No office in the City'd take him at any rate he'd like to offer. It's touch and go with that ramshackle old heart of his. So my advice to you is, don't put him to a strain, if you don't want to lose by it. For when once those papers come into my hands, I give you fair warning, I'll have my money's worth out of them. I'll drive you to marry somebody who'll pay me up in full, I can tell you that; or, if I don't, I'll have you shown up for a defaulter, as you are, in every paper in England. They shall know how you got your education by fraud, and then turned round and refused to carry out your honest bargain.'

Paul's lips quivered, and his cheek was pale, but he made no reply to this coarse outburst of the inner self in Lionel Solomons. He knew too well what was due to his own dignity. He went without a word into his bedroom next door, packed up his few belongings as hurriedly as he could, and slipped out himself to call a hansom. Then, bringing down his portmanteau to the door in his

own hands, he left Mr. Lionel in undisturbed possession of their joint apartments, and started off to his new rooms in a by-way off Gower Street.

Nevertheless, that hint of a possible eventuality disturbed his mind not a little in the night watches. It was a fact, indeed, that Mr. Solomons' heart was a feeble member; and Paul by no means relished the idea of being left with such a man as Mr. Lionel for his life-long creditor.

As for Mr. Lionel, no sooner was Paul's back turned than he drew out a photograph from his inner breast-pocket with effusion, and gazed at it tenderly. It was a photograph of a lady of mature and somewhat obviously artificial charms, enclosed in a scented russia-leather case with a gilt coronet.

'Well, he did me one good turn, anyhow,' Mr. Lionel murmured, with a rapturous look at the lady's face, 'when he introduced me to the Ceriolo. And now he's gone, I'm not sorry to be rid of him, for I can ask her here to supper as often as I like next summer, with no chance of its getting round in the end to Uncle Judah.'

For Mr. Lionel's charmer had now gone abroad, as was her usual wont, to winter-quarters. But even in those remote foreign parts she never neglected to write to her new admirer.

END OF VOL. II.







